

GEORGE KARAMANOLIS

# THE PHILOSOPHY OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Second Edition

Ancient Philosophies

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# THE PHILOSOPHY OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

This new edition introduces the reader to the philosophy of early Christianity in the second to fourth centuries AD, and contextualizes the philosophical contributions of early Christians in the framework of the ancient philosophical debates.

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**George Karamanolis** is Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy, University of Vienna, Austria. His publications include *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement? Platonists on Aristotle from Antiochus to Porphyry* (2006; revised paperback, 2013), *Studies on Porphyry* (2007, ed. with Anne Sheppard), *The Aporetic Tradition in Ancient Philosophy* (2017, ed. with Vasilis Politis), *Pseudo-Aristotle: De Mundo (On the Cosmos): A Commentary* (2020, ed. with Pavel Gregoric).

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# THE PHILOSOPHY OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

*Second Edition*

*George Karamanolis*

Second edition published 2021

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

and by Routledge

605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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First edition published by Routledge 2013

*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN: 978-0-367-14629-0 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-367-14630-6 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-0-429-05280-4 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo

by Apex CoVantage, LLC

To Phoivos and Cynthia, gratefully



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Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

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# PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION, 2021

Since the publication of *The Philosophy of Early Christianity* in 2013, the field of early Christian philosophy has flourished remarkably. I dare to suggest that the book played a role in promoting the subject. On the other hand, my more recent publications and more detailed work on aspects of this book alerted me to problems, mistakes, complications, and issues I did not do justice to in the first edition. Criticisms and suggestions of the book's reviewers, but also those of friends who read it, have also been a source of inspiration for its revision. Their positive assessments of my book have also strengthened my belief that such a book might be useful for students of ancient philosophy and Christian thought. Therefore, it needs to be more accurate, sophisticated, and up to date.

Many scholars and friends have supported me over the years, both personally and with their scholarly work. The scholarship of George Boys-Stones, Marc Edwards, Alfons Füst, Matyáš Havrda, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, Ilaria Ramelli, Johannes Steenbuch, and Johannes Zachhuber has been a source of inspiration and reflection, as will become apparent to readers of the book. Matyáš Havrda, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, and Johannes Steenbuch read several of my revised chapters and offered invaluable comments. Anthony Kroytor and Marco Hebesberger have assisted me, both with this revised edition and more generally in my duties at the University of Vienna. Anthony also went through all chapters carefully and made several stylistic improvements. Thanks to his efforts, I hope, the book is now more readable. The Humboldt Foundation financed a three-month research stay in Munich, where I worked undistracted in its rich libraries. Finally, my two children, Phoivos and Cynthia, have been a joy and a grace in my life. Their cheerful spirits have sustained and invigorated me even when we were not together. To them, this book is gratefully dedicated.

George Karamanolis  
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# PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION, 2013

This is an introductory book in two senses; it aims to introduce the reader to the philosophy of early Christianity and also aims to show that the philosophy of early Christianity is part of ancient philosophy as a distinct school of thought, and deserves to be studied as such.

Earlier drafts of the book were presented and discussed at Trinity College Dublin and at the University of Prague in specially organized workshops. I also presented material from the book at the University of Copenhagen, King's College London and the Excellence Cluster "Topoi" of Humboldt University of Berlin. I am grateful to the participants of all these events for stimulating discussions and for constructive criticism, which made me reconsider or qualify some of my claims. I am particularly indebted to the organizers of the above events, John Dillon and Vasilis Politis, Lenka Karfiková, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, and Niketas Siniouoglou, respectively. I am grateful also for their comments, often critical, on various aspects of the book and for bibliographical references. I have benefited from discussions with Peter Adamson, Robert Crellin, Filip Karfik, Chris Noble, Charlotte Roueché, Mossman Roueché, and Karel Thein. The book has profited considerably from comments on individual chapters made by Jonathan Barnes, Averil Cameron, Chris Noble, Ilaria Ramelli, Johannes Steenbuch, Anna Marmodoro, and Vanya Visnjic. I have learned much from the remarks of three anonymous referees, who read my typescript with sympathy. Steven Gerrard at Acumen has been an exemplary editor, showing patience and providing means of assistance at all stages. The copy-editor, Kate Williams, has been of invaluable assistance. Robert Crellin read a draft of the book and improved its style significantly. I thank him for that. My thanks also go to Matyáš Havrda, an expert on the philosophical scenery of early Christianity and on Clement in particular, who supported my project in all possible ways; he read drafts of several chapters, sometimes in more than one version, and made penetrating comments and bibliographical suggestions. Of course, I remain responsible for any shortcomings.

I owe an intellectual debt to Averil Cameron, Michael Frede, and Jonathan Barnes. Averil was the first to teach me about early Christianity and continued to do so over the years with her publications and in conversation. I hope I have learned from her historical sensitivity and caution. Michael Frede was unusual among students of ancient philosophy for his strong interest in early Christianity. Our conversations, mainly during my doctoral studies in Oxford, but also his many papers on aspects of early Christian philosophy, have excited my interest in the thought of early Christians and convinced me that there is much of philosophical interest in them. Finally, the book would not have been written without Jonathan Barnes's encouragement and advice.

Most of the research for this book was carried out in 2010 and 2011, while I was Humboldt fellow at the Humboldt University of Berlin. I am grateful to the Humboldt Foundation for its generous financial assistance. A senior research fellowship from the Excellence Cluster "Topoi" in the spring semester 2013 made the completion of this project possible.

George Karamanolis  
Rethymno, Crete

# ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used throughout the book for the most frequently cited works. I have divided them into two groups: ancient and modern. A list of the editions and translations of the Christian texts used is given in the bibliography. Unless otherwise noted, translations of texts are mine.

## Ancient works

Alcinous

*Didask.*            *Didaskalikos*

Aristotle

*Cat.*                *Categories*

*De an.*             *De anima*

*De gen. et corr.*   *De generatione et corruptione*

*De int.*            *De interpretatione*

*E.E.*                *Eudemian Ethics*

*Met.*                *Metaphysics*

*N.E.*                *Nicomachean Ethics*

*Phys.*              *Physics*

*Post.An.*          *Posterior Analytics*

Athanasius

*C. Arianos*        *Contra Arianos*

*C. Gentes*        *Contra Gentes*

*De incarn.*        *De incarnatione verbi*

Athenagoras

*Legatio*           *Legatio pro Christianis*

*Res.*                *De resurrectione*

## xii Abbreviations

Basil

<i>C. Eun.</i>	<i>Contra Eunomium</i>
<i>Hex.</i>	<i>Ad Hexaameron</i>
<i>Quod Deus</i>	<i>Quod Deus non est auctor malorum</i>

Cicero

<i>Acad.</i>	<i>Academica</i>
<i>De fin.</i>	<i>De finibus</i>
<i>De nat. deor.</i>	<i>De natura deorum</i>
<i>Tusc. disp.</i>	<i>Tusculanae Disputationes</i>

Clement

<i>Paed.</i>	<i>Paedagogus</i>
<i>Protr.</i>	<i>Protrepticus</i>
<i>QDS</i>	<i>Quis dives salvetur</i>
<i>Strom.</i>	<i>Stromata</i>

Diogenes Laertius

<i>D.L.</i>	<i>Lives of Eminent Philosophers</i>
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Epictetus

<i>Disc.</i>	<i>Discourses</i>
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Eunapius

<i>Vit. Soph.</i>	<i>Vitae Sophistarum</i>
-------------------	--------------------------

Eusebius

<i>D.E.</i>	<i>Demonstratio Evangelica</i>
<i>H.E.</i>	<i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>
<i>P.E.</i>	<i>Preparatio Evangelica</i>

Galen

<i>PHP</i>	<i>De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis</i>
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[Aulus] Gellius

<i>Noct. Att.</i>	<i>Noctes Atticae</i>
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Gregory of Nyssa

<i>Ad Abl.</i>	<i>To Ablabius</i>
<i>Apol.</i>	<i>Apology for Hexaameron</i>
<i>C. Eun.</i>	<i>Contra Eunomium</i>
<i>De an.</i>	<i>De anima et resurrectione</i>
<i>De hom. opif.</i>	<i>De hominis opificio</i>

Irenaeus

<i>Adv. Haer.</i>	<i>Adversus Haereses</i>
<i>Demonstr.</i>	<i>Demonstratio Apostolicae Praedicationis</i>

Justin

<i>Apol.</i>	<i>Apologia (1, 2)</i>
<i>Dial.</i>	<i>Dialogue with Trypho</i>

Lactantius	
<i>De opif. Dei</i>	<i>De opificio Dei</i>
<i>Div. Inst.</i>	<i>Divine Institutions</i>
Nemesius	
<i>De nat. hom.</i>	<i>De natura hominis</i>
Origen	
<i>C. Cels.</i>	<i>Contra Celsum</i>
<i>In Gen.</i>	<i>Commentary on Genesis</i>
<i>In Joh.</i>	<i>Commentary on John</i>
<i>Princ.</i>	<i>De Principiis</i>
Philo	
<i>De opif.</i>	<i>De opificio mundi</i>
Philoponus	
<i>De aet mundi</i>	<i>De aeternitate mundi</i>
Plato	
<i>Crat.</i>	<i>Cratylus</i>
<i>Phaed.</i>	<i>Phaedo</i>
<i>Rep.</i>	<i>Republic</i>
<i>Theaet.</i>	<i>Theaetetus</i>
<i>Tim.</i>	<i>Timaeus</i>
Plotinus	
<i>Enn.</i>	<i>Enneads</i>
Plutarch	
<i>De an. procr.</i>	<i>De animae procreatione in Timaeo</i>
<i>De def.orac.</i>	<i>De defectu oraculorum</i>
<i>De stoic. rep.</i>	<i>De stoicorum repugnantis</i>
<i>De virt. mor.</i>	<i>De virtute morali</i>
<i>Plat. Q.</i>	<i>Quaestiones Platonicae</i>
Porphyry	
<i>In Cat.</i>	<i>In Categorias</i>
<i>In Ptol. Harm.</i>	<i>On Ptolemy's Harmonics</i>
<i>Isag.</i>	<i>Isagoge</i>
<i>Sent.</i>	<i>Sententiae</i>
<i>V.P.</i>	<i>Vita Plotini</i>
Proclus	
<i>In Tim.</i>	<i>Commentary on Timaeus</i>
<i>Plat. Theol.</i>	<i>Theologia Platonica</i>
Seneca	
<i>Epist.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>
<i>Nat. Quaest.</i>	<i>Quaestiones Naturales</i>

## xiv Abbreviations

### Sextus Empiricus

*A.M.* *Adversus Mathematicos*

*P.H.* *Pyrrhoneae Hypotyposes*

### Simplicius

*In Cat.* *In Categorias*

*In Phys.* *Commentary on Physics*

### Stobaeus

*Ecl.* *Eclogae*

### Tatian

*Or.* *Oratio Ad Graecos*

### Tertullian

*Adv. Herm.* *Adversus Hermogenem*

*Adv. Marc.* *Adversus Marcionem*

*Adv. Prax.* *Adversus Praxean*

*Adv. Val.* *Adversus Valentinianos*

*Apol.* *Apologeticum*

*De an.* *De anima*

*Paen.* *De paenitentia*

*Praescr.* *De praescriptione hereticorum*

*Res.* *De resurrectione mortuorum*

### Theophilus

*Ad Autol.* *Ad Autolyicum*

## Collections of fragments, dictionaries, journals, series

*AGPh* *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*

*ANRW* *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*

*CAG* *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*

*CMG* *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum*

*CQ* *Classical Quarterly*

*CSEL* *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*

*DK* H. Diels and W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1934–1975)

*Dox. Gr.* H. Diels, *Doxographi Graeci* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1879)

*GCS* *Die Griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte* (Leipzig/Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1897–1941)

*GNO* *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*, ed. W. Jaeger et al.

*HThR* *Harvard Theological Review*

*JAC* *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*

*JECS* *Journal of Early Christian Studies*

*JRS* *Journal of Roman Studies*

JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
Lampe	G. W. H. Lampe, <i>A Patristic Greek Lexicon</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961)
Loeb	Loeb Classical Library
LS	A. Long and D. N. Sedley, <i>The Hellenistic Philosophers</i> , vols 1 and 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987)
LSJ	H. Lidell and R. Scott, <i>A Greek English Lexicon</i> , new edition, ed. H. S. Jones and R. McKenzie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968)
OECT	Oxford Early Christian Texts
OSAP	<i>Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy</i>
PG	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien
RAC	<i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i>
RE	<i>Pauly's Real-Encyclopaedie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> , ed. G. Wissowa (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1894ff.)
REG	<i>Revue des Études Grecques</i>
SC	Sources Chrésiennes
SVF	<i>Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta</i> , H. von Arnim (ed.), vols 1–3, indices M. Adler (Leipzig: Teubner, 1903–1924)
TAPA	<i>Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association</i>
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
ZAC	<i>Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

## Chronology

To help orientate the reader, I have provided some dates that I consider important for understanding the framework in which the philosophy of early Christianity develops. All dates are common era (CE).

c. 50–65	Paul writes his Letters
66	Revolt of the Jews in Palestine
79	Eruption of Vesuvius, destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum
98	Trajan becomes emperor
144	Marcion founds his own church in Rome
153–157	Justin writes his <i>First Apology</i>
160	Justin writes his <i>Second Apology</i>
161	Marcus Aurelius becomes emperor
176	Marcus Aurelius founds four chairs of philosophy, in Platonic, Peripatetic, Stoic, and Epicurean philosophy
177	Athenagoras writes his <i>Embassy for Christians (Legatio)</i> addressing Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus. Martyrdom of the Christians at Lyons, Irenaeus becomes bishop of Lyon



**xvi** Abbreviations

- 178 Celsus writes his *True Account* criticizing Christianity  
180 Death of Marcus Aurelius  
181 Theophilus writes his *To Autolytus*, addressing Marcus Aurelius  
185 Origen is born  
198 Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, first edition  
207–208 Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, second edition  
244 Plotinus comes to Rome  
270 Death of Plotinus  
284 Diocletian becomes emperor  
301 Porphyry publishes his edition of Plotinus' *Enneads*  
304 Lactantius, *De opificio Dei*  
Diocletian initiates the persecution of Christians  
311 Galerius issues the edict of tolerance  
312 Constantine becomes sole emperor of the Western Roman Empire  
325 Council of Nicaea  
360 Eunomius writes his *Apology*  
361 Julian becomes emperor  
364 Basil writes *Against Eunomius*  
379 Gregory of Nyssa writes *On the Creation of Man*  
380 Gregory writes *Against Eunomius* books I and II  
381 Gregory writes *On the Soul and Resurrection, To Ablabius That There Are Not Three Gods* and *Against Eunomius* book III, Council of Constantinople

# INTRODUCTION

## What is the philosophy of early Christianity?

Those of us brought up in the Western world have a general conception of what Christianity is. We are much less familiar, however, with the philosophy of Christianity, let alone the philosophy of early Christianity. Some readers may find these phrases puzzling for a number of reasons. One may perhaps be the vagueness of the phrase “early Christianity”. Both the apostle Paul, who wrote his letters between, roughly, 50 and 65 CE, and Augustine (354–430), who wrote many of his works in the early fifth century, are considered early Christians in the literature.<sup>1</sup> I leave both of them outside the scope of this book, however. I intend neither to discuss the philosophical ideas of Paul nor to go as far as the early fifth century and examine the philosophy of Augustine. I rather aim to focus on thinkers who lived between the second and fourth centuries, such as Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Basil of Caesarea, and Gregory of Nyssa, to name the most prominent ones. My focus, more specifically, will be on the period up until the Council of Nicaea (325) and I shall be selective with important figures from the fourth century, for reasons I will explain below.

Why do I focus on them and exclude Augustine? First, because Augustine, given the volume and the significance of his work, demands a study dedicated to him alone. Second, the work of Augustine has been examined in detail in recent decades, and there are several studies of his philosophy as a whole, as well as on specific aspects of it, such as his philosophy of mind and language.<sup>2</sup> The figures I plan to focus on in this book, however, have been comparatively less studied from a philosophical point of view and have been much less known to the historian of philosophy. To be sure, there are a number of articles and monographs that deal individually with the philosophy of Clement, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa, but, despite this literature, we still lack an appreciation of the philosophical agenda

## 2 Introduction

of these thinkers and how they fit in with the philosophical background of their time.<sup>3</sup> While we are aware of their views, we do not always have a clear picture of the philosophical questions they address – the opposite, I believe, is the case with Augustine – nor do we have a clear picture of how they set themselves in dialogue with their contemporary Hellenic/pagan philosophers. The aim of this book is to remedy this by looking closely at the philosophical issues they investigate, at the methods they use to deal with them, and to point to parallel developments in the thought of Christian and Hellenic philosophers.

A further reason for leaving aside Augustine and his contemporary Christian thinkers is that I am primarily interested in the rise of Christian philosophy, the setting of the scene, so to speak. I find this as intriguing as any starting-point in the history of philosophy. A study of early Christian philosophy is crucial for understanding philosophy in the subsequent centuries, in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the early modern period. The thought of many Byzantine philosophers, for instance, is shaped in dialogue with figures such as Clement, Origen, Basil, and Gregory of Nyssa, not only with Plato, Aristotle, and the Neoplatonists, as is sometimes thought. Furthermore, early Christian thought has had a persistent impact up until the modern period. The two extremes of this influence are Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). Kierkegaard's thought is imbued with Christianity and his philosophical point of view is profoundly Christian, while Nietzsche, in works like *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* or *The Antichrist*, strongly challenged the foundations of the Christian worldview that was developed by the figures I discuss here and he even criticized Plato as a thinker who paved the way to Christianity. Hegel lies somewhere in the middle, giving quite a bit of attention to Christianity as an intellectual movement that decisively shaped philosophy and, more generally, reason through the centuries.

Two questions immediately arise when we focus on the rise of Christian philosophy. First, why did Christians set out to develop philosophical views at all and go as far as to build a philosophy of their own? Second, which methods and programmes did they employ to accomplish this goal?<sup>4</sup> Before I address these questions, however, one may wonder at this point why I do not then include Paul, or even John the evangelist, if my focus is on the rise of Christian philosophy. Although Paul and John do employ philosophical concepts and imagery and even engage with contemporary philosophical ideas, neither of them systematically wrestles with any particular philosophical question with the rigour of later writers such as Justin Martyr, Clement or Tertullian, let alone Origen and Gregory of Nyssa.<sup>5</sup> Justin, for instance, openly claims that Christianity is philosophy, and indeed the only true philosophy, and he professes to be a philosopher of that school (*Dial.* 8.1). Similarly, Clement speaks of Christ's philosophy (*Strom.* VI.8.67.1) and he claims that it alone is true (I.11.52.3). It is indeed striking that several artefacts dating from the time of these thinkers portray Christ and the Apostles as philosophers.<sup>6</sup> Neither Paul nor John comes even close to making such claims.

Despite Justin's and Clement's claims that Christianity is philosophy and that they practise this very kind of philosophy, some readers may still be puzzled by

what I call the “philosophy of early Christianity”. They may doubt that such a thing as Christian philosophy actually exists. There is, in fact, a long line of thought traceable back to antiquity which disputes that the Christian thinkers mentioned above qualify as philosophers or have a philosophy worthy of study. This is a serious matter which needs to be addressed. It may actually be one reason for the relative scarcity of books with titles similar to this one.<sup>7</sup> Those who take such a view consider Christianity a religion, and they hold that religion is at odds with philosophy. A contemporary philosopher, William Matson, finds religion the worst offender against philosophy and claims that “the impact of Christianity on the Greek intellectual world was like that of an asteroid hitting the earth”. He goes on to suggest that Christians “tried to stamp out” philosophy.<sup>8</sup> The crux of this view is not a mere distinction between Christianity and Hellenism in terms of their respective attitudes to philosophy, such that the latter fostered philosophy while the former opposed it, but that this opposition to philosophy on the part of Christianity results from its non-rational character, which is allegedly typical of religion.

A similar view was voiced already in antiquity. Galen (second century CE), the eminent physician and philosopher, disputed the rational character of Christianity and its doctrines, arguing that the Christians do not demonstrate their views but Moses and Christ “order them to accept everything on faith (*pistis*)”.<sup>9</sup> Galen was not alone in arguing this. His contemporaries, the satirist Lucian, the Platonist Celsus, and, later, Porphyry also claimed that the Christians neither examine their views critically nor demonstrate them but simply trust their faith (*pistis*; Origen, *C. Cels.* I.9).<sup>10</sup>

Ancient and modern statements pointing to such a substantial difference between Christianity and Hellenism shaped the idea of a division of two opposing worlds, a non-Christian and a Christian one. This division, conveniently supported by the chronological distinction between two eras, before and after the advent of Christ, or between a common era (CE) and one preceding it (BCE), is indeed one of the ideas that Western education instils in us. Instrumental in the perpetuation of this idea has been the role of post-Kantian philosophers such as Nietzsche and Marx. I have already mentioned Nietzsche, as an ardent critic of Christianity; he viewed Christianity as a form of decadence on the grounds that it reverses ancient ethics by promising salvation and immortality through an ascetic ideal and strongly contrasted it with classical antiquity. Marx, on the other hand, criticized Christianity for the false hopes for transcendence, salvation, and progress that it gives. Hegel reacted to this tendency and considered Christianity important in the intellectual development of mankind, claiming that it had also been shaped by reason too. Nonetheless he contrasted philosophy, which seeks the truth by means of rational enquiry, with the Christian religion, which merely represents what it takes to be the truth.

Early Christians set out to object to the pagan criticisms of the Christians’ breaking with the ancient tradition, especially in their uncritical commitment to Scripture. The Christians, however, objected in a way that rather confirmed

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the two-world picture. They denied that their doctrines lack a rational basis by pointing out that so many of their doctrines, like the immortality of the soul, or the creation of the world by a divine intellect, had already been argued for by Plato, who was widely respected at that time and regarded as a model philosopher whose texts were treated as authoritative by the Platonists.<sup>11</sup> And, as we shall see in Chapter 3, they further claimed that demonstration and Christian faith are hardly incompatible; it is rather that the former requires the latter, in the sense that it is the Christians' acceptance of the views of Scripture that led them to demonstrate the sense in which these views are true, as was also the case with the Pythagoreans, who were committed to Pythagoras' doctrines and yet nonetheless tried to demonstrate in what sense these doctrines had hit upon the truth. One further point Christians made in this regard, as we shall see in detail in Chapter 3, is that all knowledge ultimately rests on indemonstrable principles, just as pagan philosophers had admitted (*Strom.* II.2.13.4, II.4.14.3) – and Christian doctrines are no exception. They added, furthermore, that common notions such as God and divine providence need no demonstration, because they are either universally agreed upon or perspicuous enough to simply deserve assent (*Strom.* II.2.9.6, VIII.2.7.3). Therefore, they argued, faith and demonstration are complementary, not incompatible.

None of these arguments, however, is sufficient to disarm the pagan objection to the Christian attitude towards demonstration and to rational enquiry more generally, as they were used to confirm the authoritative status of Scripture for the Christians. The pagan case against the rational character of Christianity was actually strengthened when the Christians, as we shall see in Chapter 1, criticized and even rejected philosophy on the grounds that it led to false views, while at the same time claiming that Christianity alone is the true philosophy. Early Christians thus disputed the philosophical credentials of pagan philosophers, and even when they expressed respect for some of them, as for instance, Plato, they did so on the grounds that their views were compatible with Scripture. Pagans and Christians, it would seem, turn out to agree that Christians did not do philosophy as it was practised by Plato, Aristotle, or Chrysippus. In this sense both groups contributed to the idea of an opposition and even conflict between pagan and Christian philosophy. If this is indeed the case, the initial doubt about the existence of a philosophy of early Christianity grows stronger.

We need to be cautious, however, and be aware of the rhetoric that is used by both sides. Both pagans and Christians argue that there is a significant tension between paganism or Hellenism on the one hand and Christianity on the other, contrasting the two cultures in all their respective aspects, including philosophy. This is a telling fact about the nature of Christianity that we need to take into account. Christianity was a holistic movement that aspired to transform almost every aspect of Graeco-Roman culture, religion, art, architecture, literature, social relations, language, everyday life, common and philosophical concepts, as well as the practice of philosophy.<sup>12</sup> The Christians made explicit their intention to establish a new and distinct Christian identity that was considered an improvement upon the existing non-Christian ones, Jewish and pagan or Hellenic; this is why they spoke

of themselves as a “third race” (*Strom.* VI.5.41.6).<sup>13</sup> The point of most Christian works of the second century, traditionally labelled apologetic, was the consolidation of Christian identity by means of criticizing non-Christian identities. In his *Apologeticum*, for instance, Tertullian did precisely this; he set out to explain the distinct way in which the Christians engage in social relations, their strong sense of community, and their particular attitude to politics (*Apol.* 36.3–4, 39.3–39; see further in Chapter 6). This expression of opposition does not do full justice to reality, however. While both Christians and pagans shared a belief in God, and indeed in one God,<sup>14</sup> they accused each other of atheism for not sharing the same conception of God. However, pagans clearly were not atheists, as Christians claimed, nor were Christians irrational, as pagans contended. We should be wary of the rhetoric of opposition coming from each side and try to examine matters from a measured perspective, as there is in fact not only opposition but also considerable agreement, continuity, and intense dialogue between the two sides.

In fact, it is far from clear that we are dealing with two sides. In one almost trivial sense, Christians such as Justin, Clement, Tertullian, Origen, Lactantius, and Basil were much like their educated pagan contemporaries insofar as they were educated by pagan teachers in accordance with the pagan educational ideals and by means of the same classical texts, Homer, the tragic poets, Plato (see also below, “The case for Christian philosophy”). Their writings actually preserve a great deal of ancient literature and philosophy, and they are an important source of our knowledge for lost ancient literature and philosophy. It was one of Celsus’ criticisms against the Christians, however, that they were not educated (*C. Cels.* I.27, I.62); that is, that they were not familiar with the classical authors, with Homer, the Athenian dramatists, and Plato. Yet Celsus’ criticism is tainted by polemics.<sup>15</sup> Probably only a few Christians were well educated, but the same must have been true for their pagan contemporaries, which is natural, since both groups belonged to the same culture and shared the same educational ideals.<sup>16</sup>

There is, however, a more profound sense in which pagans and Christians make up a unity. If we take a look at how Justin speaks, it becomes clear that for him Christianity was a continuation and perfection of ancient culture and ancient philosophy in particular.<sup>17</sup> Justin argued that pagan philosophy is one of the best things God had given to mankind and he claimed to have studied in many philosophical schools before turning to Christianity (*Dial.* 2.2–6; 8.1, 2 *Apol.* 12). For Justin, his turning to Christianity did not amount to making a radical change, a kind of conversion, as we might have thought of it today, but was described as a change of philosophical school. Also Clement and Origen considered Greek philosophy and especially Plato to be a preparation for Christianity in general and for understanding specific Christian doctrines in particular.<sup>18</sup> Clement’s writings are so much permeated with Platonic imagery and language that it has been justifiably claimed that Clement “uses the language of Plato as unconsciously as he uses that of the Scriptures”.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Origen wrote *On Principles* as contemporary Platonists did.<sup>20</sup> For Clement, and Origen too, Christianity was a continuation and perfection of ancient culture and ancient philosophy. It must be Celsus’ polemical attitude

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at work again in his criticism of Christianity as a novelty (*kainotomia*; *C. Cels.* III.5), hardly seen as a desirable quality in Graeco-Roman societies, which standardly valued tradition over innovation.<sup>21</sup>

As I have mentioned above, however, Christians also stress the distinct character of their identity and speak of discontinuity and disagreement with pagan culture and Christianity. Even when talking in terms of continuity, they tend to present Christianity as the highest point of ancient culture and the criterion of value for judging the past, because, they argued, the best of Hellenic philosophers and poets had been, like the Old Testament prophets, familiar with the Christian message and they had either drawn on Scripture, or their thought developed along the same lines (see further in Chapter 1).<sup>22</sup> Such claims do display a tendency in the Christian mindset to rewrite history, including cultural history, from a Christian perspective.<sup>23</sup> However, I would nevertheless insist that we should distinguish between what is said and what is indeed the case. Thanks to a number of modern studies we know that, despite what the Christians say, there was not only a considerable dialogue and exchange of elements between pagan, or Hellenic, culture on the one hand, and Christian culture on the other, an exchange that not only went both ways, but often led to a fusion of the two cultures.<sup>24</sup> And this, I submit, is the case with philosophy as well.

One indication of this is that certain Hellenic philosophers found common ground between Christianity and Hellenic philosophy. Numenius (2nd century CE) pointed to the similarity between the thought of Moses and of Plato, a view that Clement, Origen, and Eusebius enthusiastically endorse, while Amelius (third century) reportedly commented on the beginning of the Gospel of John, apparently being attracted by the reference to the *logos*.<sup>25</sup> A further indication is the acknowledged debt of Christians to Hellenic philosophers. As we shall see in the following chapters, Justin, Clement, Origen, Eusebius, and Gregory of Nyssa make clear via references to Plato that they are in constant dialogue with Plato's work, a dialogue that takes many forms, from outright acceptance to substantial alteration of his views. Besides Plato, Clement engages with Aristotle and Galen on logic, Origen draws on Stoic epistemology and on Epictetus' views on will (*prohairesis*) in order to build his own theory of human freedom of choice; Tertullian is inspired by Stoic psychology, although elsewhere in his work he criticizes Stoicism as a source of heresy (*Praescr.* 7.3), while Lactantius appeals also to the Hermetic cults in order to justify Christian beliefs.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Eusebius, Basil, and Gregory of Nyssa draw systematically on Plotinus.<sup>27</sup> It is actually quite striking that Eusebius, writing his *Preparatio Evangelica* in around 322, quotes from an edition of Plotinus' works earlier than that of Porphyry and preserves sections of Plotinus' *Enn.* IV.7 not extant in the manuscripts of the *Enneads*.<sup>28</sup> What is more, Gregory of Nyssa may well have known and used Porphyry's work; he realized that Porphyry had faced the same philosophical problem which also preoccupied him – namely how God, an intelligible entity, can account for matter – and he most likely drew on Porphyry's relevant views (see Chapter 2). Moreover, both pagans and Christians distinguish hierarchies of divine beings and both deal with the question of how these beings

relate to each other and to humankind and how we can address them. This evidence is indicative not of one's side influence on the other but of the fact that both largely share the same intellectual horizon and a similar conceptual apparatus. This, of course, does not mean that there are no differences. But, as I hope to show, these arise in the course of dealing with a philosophical agenda similar to that of their contemporary Hellenic philosophers.

Before I address this issue, however, there is a preliminary question that must be asked. Why did Christians set out to do philosophy at all, at least in their particular manner, and not simply remain one cult among many others in the Roman empire?

### **Why did the Christians do philosophy?**

One reason for the adoption of philosophy by Christianity is, in my view, its ambition to enjoy universal acceptance in Graeco-Roman society. Such an ambition is evident in the letters of Paul, the earliest Christian writings.<sup>29</sup> It is he who transformed a Jewish sect into a world religion. I leave aside the origins of such an ambition here. It is clear, however, that such an ambition led Christianity to articulate a body of doctrines that could appeal to the educated Greeks and Romans of the time. In the second century, when Christianity had spread widely across the Mediterranean region, philosophy and science had reached a peak in terms of sophistication and popularity. The criticisms of Celsus, Galen, and Lucian mentioned above show that educated pagans would not assent to Christianity unless they could be convinced by means of argument that Christian doctrines are shaped by reason and appeal to reason in the same sense that pagan philosophical and scientific views do. This would inevitably involve a deep engagement with the philosophical questions discussed in the pagan tradition; and this in turn would involve an appreciation of the relevant pagan philosophical doctrines and arguments.

If we turn to Scripture, however, we find limited doctrinal content and even less argument and philosophical explanation. Despite Christian claims of the perfection and the truthfulness of Scripture, it hardly suffices as a guide to any important philosophical issue about God, man, or the world. One could object by stating that this is not the intention of the authors of the texts that make up the Scriptures. This is of course true. The problem, however, is that these writings do contain many claims about God, mankind, and the world, but offer little clarification and even less justification. God, for instance, is presented as the creator of the world in Genesis, but it is left unclear how exactly the world's creation should be understood. Did God need matter in order to create, or did he create matter too? Both options are confronted with serious problems. If God required matter, he is neither omnipotent nor the sole principle of the world; if God did not need pre-existing matter and instead created it, then how? Should we understand creation as having taken place in two stages? This is not suggested in Genesis. But, whatever the case may be, the question inevitably arises: how can an intelligible principle bring about something so ontologically disparate from it, such as matter? Besides, if God



created the world in either of the two fashions, we are confronted with a further question, namely why God decided to do so at a particular point in time and not earlier. Confronted with such a challenge with regard to the *Timaeus*, late Platonists argued that God had never actually created the world but that God is the creator of the world only in the sense of being the principle accounting for the world's existence. The Christians disagreed with that view, but this left them exposed to the challenge Platonists were facing (see Chapter 2). The latter had been discussing the question of cosmogony in the *Timaeus* since the days of the early Academy in the fourth century BCE, while the Christians could only look as far back as Philo, the first thinker in the Judaeo-Christian tradition who dealt with such questions.<sup>30</sup>

The situation regarding the issue of the status and fate of the soul is similar. The Christians considered the soul to be immortal, but it is unclear in what sense it is so, and also how exactly the soul relates to the living body. There had been a wide-ranging debate about the immortality of the soul among Platonists, Peripatetics, and Stoics. Peripatetics (like Strato and Boethus) challenged Plato's arguments in the *Phaedo* concerning the immortality of the soul. They agreed that the soul is immortal, but only in the sense of not admitting death, not in the sense of surviving death.<sup>31</sup> Platonists like Plotinus and Porphyry replied by defending a version of the soul's immortality in the latter sense. Yet they were only able to do so after developing the concept of the soul; roughly speaking, they take the soul to primarily be an intellectual entity, which is principally responsible for our intellectual activities. The soul thus conceived does not depend on the body for its function, or so they argued. This brings us to the complex question of how the soul operates in the living body. The Christians could not ignore this question either, since also for them it is the soul that makes us both living and rational beings, and it is the element that makes us similar to God. If one postulates an intellect here, one must also address the question of the relation between soul and intellect. And this is what some of them actually did, as we will see in Chapter 4.

The situation is no different with regard to ethics. In Scripture, man is said to have been created in the image and the likeness of God (Genesis 1:26), which leads Christians to claim that the final human end is assimilation to God. In Scripture, however, the sense in which man is similar to God and how this can, practically speaking, guide us in life is not specified. There had been a strong debate among Hellenic philosophers on human highest good (*finis bonorum*) which constitutes man's final goal, as is apparent in Cicero's *De finibus bonorum et malorum*; and there had already been Platonist and Peripatetic conceptions of man's final goal as assimilation to God.<sup>32</sup> Christians had to explain how their view differed from that of Platonists and Peripatetics and why it should be preferred. This was by no means easy; they also had to discuss how we ought to handle emotions and how to deal with the challenges faced by Christians within larger society, which at the time was not, or at least not completely, Christian.

We see, then, first that Christians could not merely repeat the pronouncements of Scripture without explanation and justification, and, additionally, that even such an attempt to do so inevitably involved the qualification of the Christian claims

against the relevant pagan ones. By the time Christianity begins to establish itself, pagan philosophical arguments had already reached a very high level of sophistication and complexity, involving a considerable dialectical and logical skill, which not everyone had, as Origen points out with some sarcasm in his reply to Celsus on the topic of divine foreknowledge and pre-determination of events (*Philokalia* ch. 25.2, *C. Cels.* II.20; see further Chapter 3, pp. 114–116). Origen's reply shows, however, that the Christians were quick to rise to these standards of philosophical sophistication because they wanted to reply to their critics adequately and communicate to the educated public the sense in which scriptural claims should be understood.

The Christians were led to take the road to philosophy not only because of the need to convincingly articulate scriptural claims to non-Christians but also in order to settle issues that were perceived both as crucial and also as highly controversial among the Christians themselves. Actually, Christians were faced with several new philosophical issues, which they needed to address, such as the nature of Christ, the resurrection of the body, the problem of the Trinity. Indeed, whole new areas of philosophy come about, such as Christology, that is, the question of the nature of Christ. Both old and new philosophical issues caused tension, disagreement and conflict among early Christians. From quite early on, that is, from the beginning of the second century, disagreement and conflict are characteristic of early Christianity. The genre of heresiology in the second century emerges and quickly becomes dominant in early Christian literature.<sup>33</sup> Irenaeus writes against Valentinus and Basilides, Tertullian against Marcion, the Valentinians, Praxeas and Hermogenes, Athanasius writes against the Arians, while both Basil and Gregory of Nyssa write against Eunomius, who strikes back by writing against them and defending himself. Origen admits that there are as many different views among Christians as there are among pagan philosophers (*C. Cels.* III.12, V.61). This evidence shows that Christianity was a very diverse movement. And it could not have been such a diverse movement if early Christians had simply found their doctrines in Scripture. Instead, they had to think hard about how the statements of Scripture should be understood; they also needed an interpretation that could fend off, or at least be less open to, objections, rendering scriptural claims by turns defensible and plausible. In this sense the truthfulness of Scripture was not a given but rather a case that the Christians needed to make, and philosophy was the means.

Another element that seems crucial to me in the rise of Christian philosophy is contemporary scepticism. In antiquity scepticism comes in two versions, Academic and Pyrrhonian, both of which are well attested in the second century, the time when Christianity grows and spreads.<sup>34</sup> Pyrrhonism enjoyed a revival with Sextus Empiricus, a physician active at the end of the second century, while Plutarch (c. 45–120) and Favorinus (c. 80–160) are representative of a variant of Academic scepticism. One reason for that revival, in my view, is the significant flourishing of philosophy and science at the time. Scepticism quite generally presupposes a culture of knowledge, including philosophical knowledge, on whose status it casts doubt.<sup>35</sup> For the sceptic cannot cast doubt on whether we really know *X* to be true

unless there is first an account of knowledge of *X*, which the sceptic considers. The proponents of such accounts of knowledge in turn defended their views against sceptical attacks. The physician Galen, for instance, was concerned with opposing the scepticism of both the Academic and Pyrrhonian kinds in his works,<sup>36</sup> the Platonist Numenius strongly criticized Academic scepticism from Arcesilaus to Philo of Larissa as a dissension from Plato's philosophy and as an aberration of philosophy,<sup>37</sup> and the Peripatetic Aristocles of Messene (second century CE?) considered scepticism the wrong kind of philosophy (frs. 6–7 Chiesara).

The Christians had their own reasons to be concerned about scepticism. The sceptical suspension of judgement was a threat to Christianity: first, because it undermined the Christians' claim about the truthfulness of Scripture and the possibility of acquiring true knowledge; second, because the sceptical suspension of judgement guided the sceptic to follow inherited beliefs and customs, including religious ones.<sup>38</sup> Clement's main project in the *Stromateis* was precisely to show how true knowledge or wisdom (*gnosis*), that is, that of Christianity, can be acquired, which would justify one's departure from paganism. It is no surprise, then, to find Clement addressing sceptical arguments at the end of this work (*Strom.* VIII; see Chapter 3, pp. 106–111). Athenagoras, a contemporary of Sextus, did the same in *On Resurrection* (chs. 3–5).<sup>39</sup> These Christians set out to argue that true knowledge can be achieved, accomplishing this by drawing on the so-called dogmatic tradition of philosophy, namely Aristotle and the Stoics, as well as Galen, as we shall see in detail in Chapter 3. Such arguments, of course, can only show that true knowledge is possible, not that it is identical with the Christian one. Yet even this limited move was an important step towards the justification of Christian faith, a step which would not be surpassed in the centuries to come. Two centuries after Clement's *Stromateis*, Augustine was still concerned with criticizing Academic scepticism.<sup>40</sup>

To sum up, early Christians cultivated philosophical thinking for three main reasons: (a) in order to specify, articulate, justify, and develop the claims found in Scripture; (b) in order to settle disputes within Christianity about how scriptural claims are to be best understood; and (c) in order to defend the Christian faith and the possibility of attaining true knowledge by the Christians against the challenges of scepticism.

I shall proceed to make the case that early Christian philosophy qualifies as such. In Chapter 1, I shall address the main objections and argue for the view that early Christians did in fact do philosophy. In the following section I summarize my argument.

## The case for Christian philosophy

The fact that a number of Christians see themselves as philosophers and claim that Christianity is philosophy is understandably not sufficient to dispel the doubt, which occurs from antiquity to the present day, as to whether what these Christians do really is "philosophy". Similarly, however, I would argue that both the

Christians' rejection of philosophy and the claim that Christianity is a philosophy and indeed its perfection, should not worry us much.

To begin with, we need to allow for some rhetorical exaggeration in the Christians' criticism of Hellenic philosophy; Christians also express an appreciation of it when they praise Plato. Eusebius, for instance, on the one hand criticizes Hellenic philosophy as part of the misguided Hellenic culture on the one hand, yet on the other, praises Plato for departing from that culture and for accessing the truth.<sup>41</sup> Origen scorns syllogistic rules (*C. Cels.* III.39), but elsewhere he finds knowledge of logic important (IV.9) and criticizes Celsus for his ignorance of logic (VII.15; see Chapter 3, pp. 114–116). More importantly, however, the Christian rejection of philosophy amounts to the rejection of a specific kind of it, namely pagan or Hellenic philosophy, not of philosophy *tout court*. As I shall argue in Chapter 1, the Christian practice is similar to that of Pyrrhonian sceptics, who rejected all other schools of philosophy except for their own. The Pyrrhonian did so because they took all other philosophy to be dogmatic and as such they found that it fell short of what philosophy should be, namely unceasing enquiry. Similarly, Christians rejected Hellenic philosophy because they considered the discovery of truth to be the distinguishing feature of philosophy, which they argued only Christianity had achieved; hence in this sense only Christianity truly is philosophy. Tertullian is a good example of someone who fiercely criticizes and even rejects philosophy (e.g. *Praescr.* 7.3–9) but nonetheless claims that Christianity is a better philosophy (*De pallio* 6.4). The Christians and the Pyrrhonian make a similar point: both hold that only with them does philosophy acquire its true form.

Second, we have seen so far that Christianity was far from being a unified movement sharing a single set of doctrines, and that early Christians who set out to formulate Christian doctrines disagreed considerably. Christian thinkers such as Clement and Origen were concerned with developing views on thorny philosophical issues, such as the principles of reality, the creation of the world, the status of matter, and the soul–body relation, or the nature of Christ, all in an effort to render Christianity intelligible and convincing. One may respond, however, that all this does not necessarily amount to doing philosophy because philosophy requires a certain method consisting in argument, demonstration or proof, and this is exactly what ancient and modern critics dispute in the case of Christianity. One might also argue here that Hellenic philosophers were unlike the Christians in that they did not accept doctrine on authority, as the Christians did with Scripture. One may also add that scriptural authority often played a decisive role for early Christian thinkers, despite the fact that its doctrinal content was not always clear or specific. The Christians, indeed, often claimed, for instance, that Scripture was the measure or the criterion of truth against which they judged the views of Hellenic philosophers.<sup>42</sup> And it is undoubtedly true that there are points regarding which scriptural authority does play a decisive role in the formation of Christian doctrine, such as on the incarnation of the Christ, the resurrection of the body and the idea that the human final goal amounts to assimilation to God.

Two points can be made against the above claims. First, it would be unfair to claim that Christians were the only ones who accepted doctrine on authority. Platonists, for instance, operated similarly; they accepted a set of axiomatic points and took them to be true. Platonists did not compromise on the immortality of the soul, on the distinction between the sensible and the intelligible realms, on God's creation of the world, or on the existence of intelligible entities such as the Forms. Similar sets of doctrines can be listed for the Peripatetics, Stoics, and Epicureans, let alone the Pythagoreans, for whom the appeal to the authority of their founder was central in determining their doctrines. Ancient philosophers, unlike modern ones, usually belonged to philosophical schools or schools of thought. Practising philosophy within a school of thought, especially in late antiquity, involved the philosopher's commitment to the doctrines of his school's authorities, which he was expounding and developing. Christians were no exception to that, as Origen suggests (*C. Cels.* I.10). One can argue here, though, that Platonists or Peripatetics endorsed what Plato or Aristotle had taught on the grounds that they could demonstrate it as true, while Christians did not always do so, especially with regard to doctrines such as the incarnation of God or the resurrection of the body.

This is not entirely true, however, since Christians were also seriously concerned with showing that such doctrines are entirely reasonable. The Christian view of the resurrection of the body, which was found particularly unacceptable by the pagans, is advocated by many Christian philosophers, such as Athenagoras, Tertullian and, especially, Gregory of Nyssa.<sup>43</sup> They all set out to show, admittedly with varying degrees of success, that this is an entirely reasonable view, that there is nothing miraculous or mysterious in it, but it depends much on how we should understand human body. Furthermore, all early Christian thinkers go to great lengths, and become very sophisticated in their attempts, to explain the sense in which the divine persons of the Trinity are related to each other so that they make up a unity and how God's incarnation should be understood.

Second, we need also to remember that accepting the authority of a text may not amount to much in the end. Plato's presumed doctrine of the immortality of the soul, which was accepted by all Platonists, allows for a variety of positions on the exact nature of the soul and how the soul operates in, and frees itself from, the body. Platonists such as Plotinus needed to think deeply in order to specify the sense in which the soul is immortal and what this means for its connection with the body; his argument had to be convincing and fit within the framework of Platonic philosophy. Plotinus' view on the soul's relation to the body and his understanding of the soul is, on the whole, quite different from that of Platonists such as Plutarch or his contemporary Longinus. Clearly, the acceptance of Plato's authority did not, for Plotinus, solve the puzzle of how the soul relates to the body. Quite the opposite is the case; Plotinus confesses his puzzlement as to what exactly Plato's position on the soul was (*Enn.* IV.8.1). Similarly, scriptural authority did not help Christians to articulate a view on the status of matter, the relation of names to things, of soul to body or the issue of human free choice; even when Scripture contains a relevant statement, this is vague enough to allow

for a variety of interpretations, often conflicting ones, and the challenge is to identify the most plausible one.

Let me give an example. With regard to the status of the human soul, Christians typically rely on Genesis 2:7, where it is said that God breathed into Adam's nostrils and thus ensouled him, and also on some of Jesus' statements in the New Testament implying a tripartite distinction between soul, body, and spirit (*pneuma*; e.g. Luke 23:46, 1 Thess. 5:23). But as we shall see in Chapter 5, scriptural pronouncement settles neither the issue of the nature of the soul nor of the soul's relation to, and function in, the body. As Origen points out expressing his puzzlement (*Princ.* pref. 5), there existed a variety of Christian positions on these issues. We can distinguish three groups, each holding its own view: (a) those who consider the soul an intelligible substance but a generated one (Justin, Irenaeus); (b) those who consider the soul an intelligible but ungenerated substance (Origen); and (c) those who consider the soul to be a corporeal substance (Tertullian). So, although all Christians shared the same starting-point, Scripture, they took strikingly different positions. This is not an isolated case, but rather typical. We find a similar variety of views also on cosmogony, on the status of matter, and on virtue and the afterlife, as we shall see in Chapters 2 and 6. If Scripture allows for such a variety of positions, then the appeal to Scripture alone cannot settle any issue. This is actually confirmed by the fact that, as I have mentioned above, there were so many different views among early Christians that conflict, tension, and even polemics resulted despite the commitment to Scripture of all sides involved.

But even when Scripture suggests a view that can be endorsed as such, it does not specify how one should deal with the objections and difficulties that it may give rise to. It is rather the work of the Christian exegete to foresee and address these difficulties. In his Letter to the Romans (Rom. 7:17–23), Paul famously confesses to a conflict between the desires of his body and the commands of his mind. It is left unclear, however, why this split occurs and how, if at all, we have the power to choose. This is left for Christian philosophers to spell out (see Chapter 4). I have already mentioned that Christian thinkers tried to articulate a defensible interpretation that avoids the worst of difficulties, leaving those they may best be dealt with. The task, however, is more complex than that, because the position one takes on one issue often bears heavily upon the others. Origen, for instance, realizes that the issue of cosmogony is crucially linked with the issue of the nature of the human soul and the question of theodicy, and his interpretation is crafted with a view to address all these questions jointly (see Chapters 2, 4, and 5). The situation is similar in ancient Platonism; the interpretation of the cosmogony of the *Timaeus* bears heavily on the nature and the role of Forms and on the status of human souls. Both Christians and Platonists are not merely taking positions on individual issues; rather, they set out to build doctrinal systems that aim to do justice to a certain philosophical point of view. They construct their doctrines employing well-known strategies, such as arguments based on what the concepts suggest, the appeal to empirical evidence, the *reductio ad absurdum* (i.e. an argument illustrating that a certain view leads to an absurd conclusion and so cannot be true) and so on.

What of the oft-repeated criticism that Christianity does not qualify as philosophy because it is a religion? A number of misunderstandings are involved here too. To begin with, it is quite unclear what exactly we mean by “religion” and why this is something that stands in opposition to philosophy.<sup>44</sup> If it is the belief in God that is meant, ancient philosophers, unlike moderns, have always been committed to the existence of God and they were concerned with the question of God’s status. Theology was a central part of ancient philosophy. The distinction between philosophy and theology, today conceived as distinct academic disciplines, was foreign to the ancient world; it rather originated with the foundation of the medieval university.<sup>45</sup> For Aristotle, for instance, theology was part of the science of being (*Met.* V.2) and he indeed claims that theology is the noblest of philosophical disciplines (*timiōtatēn*, *Met.* 1026a21). This inspires the author of the pseudo-Aristotelian *De mundo* (first to second century CE) to make a similar claim (391a18). For this author, philosophy amounts to theology (*theologeîn*; 391b5), in the sense that philosophical research crucially involves the study of the cause of the orderly arrangement of *kosmos*, the world, namely God.<sup>46</sup> The author of *De mundo* reacts to and qualifies a Stoic idea, according to which the orderly arrangement of the world is accounted for by the immanent presence of the divine, and this is what philosophy should teach us. It is no surprise that Seneca points out that philosophy teaches man how to worship the gods (*Epist.* 90.3). Similarly, Galen argues that the usefulness of all the parts of a human organism suggests the existence of a providential god (*On the Usefulness of Parts*, vol. IV Kühn, 360.10–361.5). If we now look at late antique Platonists, such as Plutarch, Plotinus, Porphyry, or Iamblichus, we find that they often address the issue of how we should connect ourselves to gods.<sup>47</sup> This evidence shows that for philosophers in antiquity, let alone in late antiquity, there was hardly such a distinction between theology and philosophy; the former was part of the latter.

If, in turn, religion is understood as ritual, it is not very clear why this amounts to irrationality either. Plutarch spent parts of his life serving as a priest at the temple of Apollo in Delphi, and this activity informed his Pythian dialogues such as *De E apud Delphos* and *De Pythiae oraculis*. Plutarch actually finds that there is no tension between religious rituals and philosophy. The same is true also for later Platonists such as Iamblichus, Proclus, and Damascius. They also combined philosophical work, especially on theology, with engagement in ritual.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Tertullian and Lactantius claim that Christianity is a religion and apparently by that they mean that it includes both the belief in the Christian God and a certain set of rituals. Both, however, especially Tertullian, take a stand on philosophical topics such as the nature of soul and the status of matter, and both Tertullian and Lactantius view Christianity as philosophy too.<sup>49</sup> No pagan or Christian has to abjure reason in order to engage in religious practices. Both pagans and Christians practise and also discuss prayer from a philosophical point of view and, given that both groups accept hierarchies of divine beings, one common issue of discussion is which of them ought be addressed in our prayers and how.<sup>50</sup>

It is true, of course, that Christians often stress the limits of reason, but they are not alone in that either; Galen and Iamblichus do that as well. Galen, for instance,

admits that he is not a position to know the essence of God (*On My Own Opinions*: ch. 2) and that he cannot even establish by rational means a possible cause for the formation of an embryo (*On the Formation of the Foetus*, vol. IV Kühn, 699–700). The central role of theology and of ritual in Christianity actually confirms that it is a typical product of late antiquity; these elements shape Christian philosophy just as they do Neoplatonism. I therefore cannot see why this fact alone should then cast doubt on the philosophical status of either Christians or Neoplatonists.

It seems to me that the philosophical aspect of early Christianity has been underestimated by the historians of late antiquity. They have overemphasized the social and political dimension of Christianity; they conceive of Christianity as a rapidly expanding social movement of a religious nature whose asset was the simplicity of its views and they focus on its social and political side.<sup>51</sup> The Christians, however, were also capable of producing views of considerable philosophical sophistication, as we shall see in detail. It was not the simplicity of the Christian message that accounts for Christianity's success and expansion but rather, I suggest, its capacity to develop sophisticated arguments and theories, respond to objections from its critics, operate at different levels of complexity, and appeal to people of different educational and social levels, including those trained in philosophy.

Of course, not all Christian philosophers are of the same calibre. Some were good only at criticizing the views of others and exposing their weaknesses. Tertullian and Irenaeus fall into this category. Although their dialectical skill matches that of sophists in fifth-century-BCE Athens, they were not always prepared to engage with the complications of the issue in question and articulate a fully fledged theory that could at least address the consequent issues. While they criticize those who consider matter a principle of creation, for instance, they do not articulate an alternative theory concerning the nature and provenance of matter. However, Clement and, especially, Origen and Gregory of Nyssa take their investigation to a much deeper level. They realize what is philosophically at stake and offer an answer that can do justice to the complexity of a given question, an answer which often has the form of a bold theory. Similar differences pertain to pagan philosophers too. Not all Peripatetics and Platonists resemble Alexander of Aphrodisias and Plotinus in realizing the difficulties of their masters' doctrines and in engaging with them. From all we know about the Peripatetic Aristocles of Messene and the Platonists Atticus and Taurus (and this is little), they seem to have been better critics than theorists. Such differences, however, are within the range of the practice of philosophy, which admits various levels of sophistication and skill. The Christians are no exception to that, either.

## The cultural landscape

Since Christianity is not merely a philosophical movement but rather a sweeping cultural movement with a philosophical aspect, it is essential not to separate philosophy from Christian culture as a whole. This connection is made plain by the fact that almost all the figures I discuss in this book were not only philosophers



but also biblical scholars, bishops or orators, and their philosophical activity was attuned to these activities. Again, Christians are not alone in this. Figures such as Posidonius, Plutarch, Sextus, Galen, and Ptolemy were not only philosophers but also accomplished historians, artists, and scientists. When we take an interest in their philosophical profiles, however, we need to focus on the philosophical issues they engage with, and this will be the exact approach taken with the Christians presented in this book. It is essential, however, to be aware of the cultural landscape in which the rise of Christian philosophy takes place, because the former doubtless considerably shaped the latter.

Christianity was born in the first century CE, but it matured in the second. This was when the term “Christian” first surfaced and when Christianity expanded throughout the Mediterranean region and the Christian population grew considerably.<sup>52</sup> This is quite striking given that Christianity met with considerable resistance on the part of the Roman empire, which included several local persecutions, such as that in Lyon in 177, in Alexandria during Septimius’ reign (202–203), and of course the persecutions of Decius (249–251) and Diocletian (303–305).<sup>53</sup> Naturally enough, the rise of Christian thinking follows these developments as well as contemporary cultural tendencies, including that of pagan polemic and pagan aggression. The rapid rise of Christianity took place, however, in a century of general prosperity. The second century has been described, on the one hand, by Edward Gibbon, as the most happy and prosperous period of history,<sup>54</sup> and, on the other, by E. R. Dodds, as “an age of anxiety”, that is, religious anxiety.<sup>55</sup> Both descriptions are one-sided, yet both capture an element of reality. From the knowledge available to us, philosophy and science flourished in the second century. A number of important Platonists and Peripatetics were active in this century, including Apuleius, Numenius, Atticus, Severus, and Calvenus Taurus among the Platonists; Aspasius, Adrastus, Sosigenes, Aristocles, and Alexander of Aphrodisias among the Peripatetics. Among the Stoics we count Epictetus (he died around 135) and Emperor Marcus Aurelius, while Pyrrhonian scepticism was revived in the writings of Sextus Empiricus, as I have mentioned. Marcus Aurelius established chairs of philosophy in Rome, one for each of the major schools: Platonism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism, and Epicureanism. Science also reached a peak, exemplified by the astronomer Ptolemy, the physicians Galen, Sextus Empiricus, and Soranus, and the mathematician Apollonius of Perga.

The flourishing of philosophy is part of a more general renaissance of letters and education in the second century. The Imperium Romanum was an “intercultural landscape”, within which anyone in possession with Greek *paideia* could easily travel. There was a noticeable proliferation of public buildings, statues and other works of art. This is not a coincidence but rather the result of a general emphasis on education, which was accompanied with a strong orientation towards, and inspiration from, the classical past. The emperor Hadrian founded the Athenaeum (in 135 CE), a place of education in the *artes liberales*, named after the Goddess Athena, with the aim of stimulating Greek culture in Rome (*Historia Augusta*

Antoninus Pius 11.3). Rome had been a multicultural cosmopolitan metropolis since the time of the Antonine emperors. By the fourth century, 29 public libraries had been founded in Rome, a city permeated by Greek culture, creating favourable conditions for intellectuals in the city.<sup>56</sup> Indeed intellectuals of various ethnic backgrounds migrated to Rome (Porphyry was a Phoenician, Longinus and Tatian Syrians, Plotinus an Egyptian).<sup>57</sup> Galen's teacher Eudemus, a Peripatetic, had been living in Rome for more than ten years and had a circle of pupils there. There was both imperial and private funding for philosophers in Rome. Intellectuals and philosophers often had Roman patrons (Lucian, *Nigrinus* 24, Juvenal, *Sat.* 3, 41–77). Plotinus is an eminent example of this tendency; we know of a private patroness, a wealthy Roman woman named Gemina (*V. P.* 9), who not only enthusiastically attended Plotinus' seminars together with her daughter of the same name, but also provided Plotinus and his close circle of students with a house, classrooms and slaves. Plotinus was friends with the emperor Gallienus and with Chrysaorius and Gedalius, who were consul and senator respectively.

Alexandria was another important cultural centre at that time, famed particularly for scientific education. It is revealing of the scientific climate of the city that Origen accuses Celsus of thinking that knowledge of God can be attained by means of a synthesis analogous to the one spoken by geometers (*C. Cels.* VII.44). Eunapius mentions a public school (*didaskaleion koinon*) in Alexandria whose leadership was assigned to the sophist Magnus (*Vit. Soph.* 498). Excavations in one of Alexandria's quarters have revealed the existence of lecture halls in use from at least the fourth century CE onwards.<sup>58</sup>

This is the time of the so-called second sophistic, which was marked by an intense concern with correct Attic Greek and an imitation of the classical models from the fifth and fourth century BCE, such as Thucydides, Isocrates, and Plato.<sup>59</sup> The classicizing tendency had both an educational and a social effect. Erudition and linguistic skill were the mark of an upper class of Hellenes who played a pivotal role in society.

Christianity grew in this cultural environment and adapted to it. An ambitious movement, Christianity aimed to become both as distinct as possible and as all-embracing as possible, a situation that often resulted in tensions. Tertullian, for instance, was a typical second-century sophist who exhibited profound learning and considerable rhetorical skill, yet he was also a critic of the culture he belonged to.<sup>60</sup> The fact that so many Christian works of this century are directed against the pagans, like those of Tatian, Clement, and pseudo-Justin, is indicative of a tendency in early Christianity to react to the pagan polemic, intellectual as well as political. A central aspect of this tendency was the plea of Christians that they are also committed to *logos*, reason, and they share many of the important values shaping the Roman empire (see Chapter 6, pp. 214–220). Several Christians' works of this time are also directed against the Jews, like Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* (the Jew). Both kinds of works, against the pagans and against the Jews, are indicative of a strong tendency among Christians to forge an identity distinct from Hellenism and Judaism while still embracing both.<sup>61</sup> This tendency must account, at least partly, for the

formation of an important movement within Christianity that we call Gnosticism, which is responsible for considerable tension in early Christianity.

Gnostics were Christians professing to have knowledge (*gnosis*) of a kind, which was professed to be higher than that of the doctrine propagated by the Church. It is not always clear which groups fall under this label.<sup>62</sup> Scholars dispute, for instance, whether Marcion was a Gnostic.<sup>63</sup> Although Gnosticism was a complex and rather vague phenomenon, three things seem to me to be fairly clear about it. First, Gnostics were committed Christians. They accepted the God of the Old and New Testament and the story of salvation of mankind narrated there, yet they interpreted the Bible and especially the relation between Old and New Testament through their own lenses. Second, they believed that they differed from Jews or Christians with Jewish background, arguing that the Christian God they believed in was different from the God of the Old Testament. The latter is the creator of this world and also, given the evidence of the Old Testament, irascible, envious and thus, in their view, wicked, or at least not entirely good and benevolent, while they considered the Christian God of the New Testament to be quite the opposite. From what we know, Marcion advocated this position<sup>64</sup> and Valentinus' view was similar; the latter conceived of a creator God ignorant of a higher God and of the created realm as the product of a deficient, ignorant creator.<sup>65</sup> Third, Gnostics believed that there were different classes of humans, each having different abilities and constitutions, and they considered themselves to belong to those who were intellectually and spiritually gifted, destined for salvation. This is what Valentinus maintained, as we shall see in Chapter 4.

The beliefs of the Gnostics that the world is full of wickedness, the product of a wicked, irascible creator, and that only a select few are destined for salvation, were at odds with the views of both pagan philosophers and of non-Gnostic Christianity. This is why Gnostic Christianity triggered such strong reactions both from within and outside of Christianity, as was the case with Plotinus, who wrote a long treatise against Gnostics, which was then divided into four parts by Porphyry (*Enn.* III.8, V.8, V.5, II.9; treatises 30–33).

Within Christianity, thinkers such as Irenaeus, Tertullian and Clement invested a great deal of energy in arguing against the Gnostics. This is because much was at stake regarding the identity of the Christian movement. Anti-Gnostic Christians insisted that Christianity, for all its differences, was continuous with both Judaism and Hellenism; that the Christian God of the New Testament is none other than the God of the Old Testament; and that Hellenic culture, especially philosophy, is not completely false, but rather contains elements of the Christian doctrine. This was the case, they argued, because the Christian *logos* had always been active in history and shaped several of the views held by Hellenic philosophers, especially Plato (see Chapter 1). From what we know, the Gnostics were skilled in philosophy<sup>66</sup> and they were also careful exegetes of Scripture, but the point of anti-Gnostic Christians was that their views were often clothed in myth and remained undemonstrated, implausible, and unappealing.<sup>67</sup> Plotinus' criticism of Gnosticism in *Enneads* III.8, V.8, V.5, II.9 casts doubt on the philosophical skills of his adversaries

(*Enn.* II.9.14),<sup>68</sup> and finds their worldview untenable. No other confrontation of Plotinus is so frontal and vehement as that with the Gnostics.

Even if we exclude the Gnostics, however, Christianity accommodates many different tendencies. These tendencies become particularly conspicuous in places with high concentrations of Christians, which soon emerge as centres of Christian thought and culture, such as Rome, Alexandria, Corinth, and Antioch. Early Christians speak from fairly early on of heretics and of heresies as opponents of the established doctrine of the Church, and modern literature often retains this nomenclature.<sup>69</sup> We must often remind ourselves, however, that all these people claimed equally to be Christians, and we should avoid looking at the early stages of Christianity from the point of view of later-emerging orthodoxies. This is not as easy as it seems. Both the state of the evidence and modern scholarship cast more light on some sides than others. This is actually the intended outcome of the polemics used by Christian themselves, who wanted to present their opponents' views as a deviation from an alleged orthodoxy which they represented. We encounter a similar phenomenon in contemporary Platonism. As I have already mentioned, Numenius (and before him Antiochus) criticized earlier Platonists for deviation from the orthodoxy that they represented.

Not all tendencies within Christianity caused tension, however. Cities such as Rome, Antioch, and Alexandria hosted schools and circles teaching Christian doctrines of various profiles, as was also the case with the philosophical circles and schools of Hellenic philosophers, like that of Plotinus in Rome, for instance. Particularly prominent among them was the Christian school of Alexandria. Two important Christian thinkers were active there: Clement, who was educated by Pantaenus (Eusebius, *H.E.* V.10), and Origen.<sup>70</sup> Origen was a man of profound learning, sharp philosophical acumen and creative imagination. He was the first Christian philosopher who tried to address most important philosophical questions from a Christian point of view and set out to construct a coherent doctrinal system which was Christian. Origen moved to Caesarea at some point, but he wrote his fundamental work *On Principles* in Alexandria.

Characteristic of the school of Alexandria, and of Origen in particular, was the concern with the possible meanings of the text of Scripture. Christians came to realize that very early on. The Gnostics based their provocative doctrines – such as that on the existence of three distinct classes of humans, the spirited, the psychic and the earthly – on certain biblical passages (see Chapter 4). And they even went as far as to write their own Gospels, such as the Gospel of Truth, where their own understanding could be easily founded.<sup>71</sup> Origen's unwavering endeavour was to look at Scripture from a scholarly, exegetical point of view. Origen's method consisted in moving beyond the letter to the spirit, or to the will (*boulēma*), of the biblical text (*C. Cels.* III.20, III.74, IV.17, IV.39). Sometimes this leads him to claim that a text says something other than what is apparent, and he defends an allegorical interpretation. This means an interpretation that not only looks beyond the letter of the text but also one that replaces the ostensible or obvious subject with the arguably proper one. As I argue in Chapter 1, Origen was pursuing a line

of thought that goes back to Philo and was characteristic also of his contemporaries Longinus and Plotinus, who set out to discover the intentions of Plato in his dialogues.<sup>72</sup>

Origen had to first make sure that we had the correct text of Scripture. Some controversies among early Christians were the result of accepting different readings of the Scriptures in crucial parts. One of them was Genesis 2:7, where God is said to have breathed life into Adam's nostrils. The question was whether God breathed his own *pneuma* or his *pnoē* (see Chapter 5), which reminds us of the situation Platonists found themselves in with regard to the text of the *Timaeus*.<sup>73</sup> Origen became famous for his *Hexapla*, a work dedicated to the close comparison of the text of the Old Testament in six versions: the Hebrew original, a transliteration in Greek characters, and four Greek translations including the Septuagint.<sup>74</sup> The example of Origen confirms that the text of Scripture was open to discussion and interpretation and demanded a varied set of skills from the Christian exegete. And this in turn confirms my earlier statement that the truthfulness of Scripture was not a given, but a case that Christians needed to make.

## The method, scope and limits of this study

In this final section I wish to emphasize several methodological points that I consider important in this study. First, I shall focus on the philosophy of some important early Christian philosophers, doing so by way of examining how they engage with key philosophical issues, considered crucial since at least the time of Plato. These issues include first principles and the question of cosmogony, the question of human knowledge, the problem of free will, the relation of soul to body, and the issue of human happiness. I admittedly focus more on the traditional philosophical issues rather than the new ones (such as Christology) which have arisen with Christianity. One reason for this choice is that I want to show how the Christians enter into the ancient philosophical debates and what is distinctive in their approach. In order to do so, I will first outline the relevant ancient philosophical debate in each of the following chapters.

This approach is suitable for a number of reasons. First, as we shall see, early Christian philosophers were in dialogue not only with past and contemporary philosophers but also with each other, and their views cannot be fully understood unless they are considered within the framework of this dialogue and set against the parallel debates among Platonists, Peripatetics, Sceptics, and Stoics. Second, such an approach sheds light on the difficulties pertaining to the philosophical issues discussed by the Christians. These difficulties emerge only when a certain argument for a solution is advanced. Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen, for instance, argued that God had created the world *ex nihilo*, but they did not offer a satisfactory answer to the question of how an intelligible entity could produce matter. Their conception of matter did not allow them to give a clear answer to that question. This came later with Gregory of Nyssa, who rejected the conception of matter as substrate and maintained that matter is not a being and that material entities are

merely clusters of qualities. Such instances show not only that there was a dialogue going on among early Christian philosophers but also that Christian thought was developing as a result of this dialogue. Third, such an approach proves that the formation of Christian views did not result from an attachment to Scripture, at least not Scripture alone, but from an intellectual process of reflection and discussion that involved weighing the available options and deciding on the most defensible one. And, as with Hellenic philosophers, disagreement was an intrinsic part of such a process.

By taking this approach, I hope to be able to show that early Christian thinkers make up a school of thought that features distinct philosophical views. The Christian perspective on cosmogony, for instance, is similar to that of contemporary Platonists, who also admit a creator God, yet it is different in the Christian denial of the world's eternity and the necessity of matter. One widespread Christian conception of the human soul distances itself equally from the Platonist view that the soul is essentially immortal and from the Peripatetic and Epicurean views that it is mortal, arguing instead that the soul, although created, becomes immortal by means of God's will. And Clement advances an interpretation of Aristotle's *Categories* that combines the available interpretations, the ontological and semantic (see Chapter 3, pp. 111–113). The distinctive character of Christian views suggests that we are dealing with a proper school of thought that deserves to be seen as an integral part of ancient philosophy.

This has not been appreciated until now for a variety of reasons, one of them being the prejudice that early Christians did not do philosophy. I have already addressed that view and I shall add more in Chapter 1. There are some further reasons, however, which account for the incomplete integration of early Christian philosophers with ancient philosophy as a whole. Prominent among them is the tendency to treat early Christian philosophers, together with much later Christian thinkers, as a group with collective identity: the “Christian Fathers”.<sup>75</sup>

The term “Christian Fathers” is not an innocent rubric, however; rather, it is a blanket term that groups together thinkers from different ages, who engage with different issues, many of whom were not philosophers in any sense. Implicit in that classification is the view that Christianity had been developing towards some kind of orthodoxy, which was not the case, as their disagreement clearly shows. Besides, this rubric confers uniformity and authority to Christian thinkers from different ages, and this does not facilitate the appreciation of their distinct intellectual profiles. Furthermore, this approach dictates the study of these figures as theologians and students of Scripture,<sup>76</sup> which is why in such studies we typically hear about their methods of studying the Scriptures, their arguments for faith, their Christology and their eschatology. Yet this approach does not fully do justice to the profile of Justin, Clement or Origen in that it sharply separates them from the philosophical concerns of their pagan contemporaries. This division is not accurate because they also write on principles, on the soul, on creation and on free will, and protreptic works – which is evidence of their engagement with the standard

philosophical issues in antiquity – and they do so in ways similar to those of Plutarch, Alcinous, Alexander, Numenius, Plotinus, and Porphyry.

This was admittedly realized long ago. There is a wealth of literature on the affinities between pagan and Christian philosophers on specific philosophical issues. These affinities, however, need to be properly appreciated. It is often pointed out that Christian philosophers appropriated, took over, followed or integrated Platonic, Peripatetic or Stoic views. There are several studies on the Christian appropriation of Plato, the Christian use of Aristotle or the Stoicism of the Church Fathers. I find this kind of approach somewhat misguided.<sup>77</sup> First, it tells only half of the truth. The Christians did not intend to appropriate Plato, Aristotle or the Stoics, but did so with a view to creating something new: the Christian doctrine. It is this new synthesis that motivated and guided their dialogue with Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic philosophy, and it is this new synthesis that should be of primary interest, and not the materials used in its construction. It is in the nature of philosophy to proceed by drawing on the past. The Christian project of building a philosophical system by drawing on the history of philosophy is not idiosyncratic at all. This is clearly what the Stoics did with respect to Heraclitus and Plato and what Epicureans did with respect to the ancient atomists. It would be wrong, however, to consider the Stoics and the Epicureans as mere appropriators of Heraclitus and Plato and the atomists, respectively. Ancient Platonists made this argument against the Stoics and the Epicureans,<sup>78</sup> and Christians such as Clement claimed that Aristotle and the Stoics depended on Plato, and Epicurus on Democritus (*Strom.* II.19.100.3–101.1, VI.2.27.3–4). This kind of claim, however, served a clear polemical aim: to diminish the significance of all successive philosophical schools and to raise the status of their models.

Similar is the effect of this modern academic approach to Christian philosophy. It implies that early Christian philosophy is, at least to some extent, reducible to Platonism, to Aristotelianism, to Stoicism, or a mixture of all these. But this is hardly true. A similar approach was taken up until the early twentieth century with regard to the philosophy of Plutarch and Plotinus. Their philosophies were thought to be a mixture of Platonism, Aristotelianism, and Stoicism. Recent scholarship has clearly shown that their philosophies are much more complex than mere mixture of elements from other philosophical schools. Similar, I think, is the case with early Christian philosophy. If we want to understand what early Christian philosophers did, rather than uncover what they inherited from the philosophy that preceded them, we need to appreciate their questions and their search for answers. Only then can we identify some interesting and distinctly Christian views such as those on individuals, on divine grace and on the human will. This is one of the aims of this book.

As I have mentioned earlier, this book is limited to the period from the beginnings of Christian philosophy in the early second century until the end of the fourth century and the work of Gregory of Nyssa. Even within this range I am selective, however. I leave out not only Augustine and John Chrysostom, active at the end of the fourth and beginning of the fifth century, but also Arnobius and

Marius Victorinus, who wrote in the first half of the fourth century. I focus more on those Christian philosophers who were active before the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE. The reason for this predilection is that an important change takes place after the Council of Nicaea: a legislative body that decides and settles doctrinal disputes is established, the assembly of bishops – and this assembly is largely political in nature. From that point on, Christianity relies more and more on ecclesiastical and political authority. Athanasius, for instance, insisted on the authoritative status of Nicaea, calling it the “ecumenical council”, in order to eliminate Arianism.<sup>79</sup> This, of course, does not mean that Christian philosophy was eclipsed. Quite the opposite is the case. Basil and Gregory of Nyssa are distinguished for their deep and sophisticated engagement with some of the most central questions of Christian philosophy that had arisen earlier, yet systematic treatment was still pending: cosmogony, the status of God, and the nature of names. That is why I have decided to include them in this book.

Finally, a word is due here about the order of the chapters that follow. The Christian conception of philosophy and Christian methodology is discussed in Chapter 1, because an explanation and a justification of early Christian philosophy are prerequisites for what follows. Chapter 2 focuses on the most important cluster of issues for early Christian philosophers, namely first principles and the question of cosmogony. The status of God and his relation to the world and to man is also examined here. A chapter on logic and epistemology follows (Chapter 3), in order to further examine the issues from Chapters 1 and 2, such as the role of demonstration in Christian philosophy, the Christian engagement with scepticism, and the linguistic descriptions as evidence of God’s nature. Chapter 3 also addresses several logical issues important for Chapter 4, which focuses on human free will, such as the question as to whether divine foreknowledge entails determinism of future events. Chapter 5, on the soul and its relation to the body follows because Christian theories on the nature of the soul were often designed with a view to settle the question of human will. The chapter on ethics and politics (Chapter 6) comes last because it builds on theories of human psychology and of human nature more generally and also because the Christians, like their contemporary pagan philosophers, considered ethics (which included politics) as the end and aim of philosophy. This is because the Christians, as we shall see in the next chapter, agreed with pagans in considering philosophy a way of life.

## Notes

- 1 We find both Paul and Augustine in accounts of early Christianity and early Christian thought: e.g. Chadwick (1967); Osborn (1976).
- 2 See, for instance, O’Daly (1987); Horn (1995); Menn (1998); Stump and Kretzmann (2001).
- 3 See the Bibliography for articles and monographs that deal individually with aspects of the philosophy of Clement, Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. The literature on these thinkers has become extremely abundant in recent years.
- 4 I deal with these questions below and in Chapter 1.



- 5 There is much recent literature advocating Paul's debt to Hellenistic philosophy, especially Stoicism, but also to Platonism. See Malherbe (1987, 1989), Thorsteinsson (2010), Engberg-Pedersen (2010), Rasimus, Engberg-Pedersen, and Dunderberg (2010). See also the review of Ramelli (2020: 292–297). There is also literature advocating the philosophical nature of John's Gospel, such as Engberg-Pedersen (2017). These are important studies showing the impact on pagan philosophy of Paul and John. However, neither of them does philosophy, much as they are knowledgeable of and influenced by contemporary philosophical views.
- 6 See Hörich (1986: 47–49). In the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas saying 13, Jesus is said to be “like a wise philosopher” (Nag Hammadi Codex II.2–7, ed. B. Layton).
- 7 However, see Wolfson (1970a); Osborn (1981); Stead (1994); and, more recently, Morlet (2014). The methods and aims of these studies are quite different from the present one, as I explain below.
- 8 Matson (2011: 6, 134). For an assessment of this book, see the review by R. Pasnau and J. Stenberg (2013) in *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/32152-grand-theories-and-everyday-beliefs-science-philosophy-and-their-histories/> (accessed October 2013).
- 9 This is preserved in an Arabic fragment cited by Walzer (1949: 14). On this issue, see Chapter 3.
- 10 See Nestle (1948: 623–627). For references and further discussion, see Chapter 3.
- 11 See, for instance, Clement, *Strom.* V.13.89.6, Origen, *C. Cels.* VI.1.
- 12 As Cameron has rightly pointed out (1990), Christianity developed a totalizing discourse. The Christian response to pagan literature is the subject of many studies; see e.g. Edwards (1992: 459–474), Simelides (2009). On the Christian response to art and architecture, see Nasrallah (2010). The impact of Christianity on social relations has been deeply studied by Brown (1995) and Salzman (2002). See also Segal (1986: esp. 80–88).
- 13 The characterization “third race” (*genos, ethnos*) is common in early Christian authors. On Christian self-definition, see Marcus (1980) and Armstrong (1980), and, more recently, Lieu (2004: esp. 1–26).
- 14 See Frede's introduction to Frede and Athanassiadi (1999), and also the essays in Mitchell and Van Nuffelen (2010: esp. editors' introduction, 1–15), and Frede (2010: 53–81). See also below pp. 109, 205.
- 15 On education in late antiquity, see Marrou (1948); Hadot (1984: esp. 215–293); Criboire (2001: esp. 192–204). On the teaching of Plato more specifically, see Snyder (2000: 93–121). The educational value of Plato becomes clear from the complaint of the Platonist Taurus that many of his students were interested in Plato for his style and not for his philosophy (Aulus Gellius, *Noct. Att.* XVIII.20.6).
- 16 See Gamble (1995: 1–41).
- 17 This is well argued by Thorsteinsson (2012: 492–517). For more on Justin, see Chapter 1, esp. pp. 34–35.
- 18 *Strom.* I.11.56.1, VI.14.110.3, Origen, *Epistle to Gregorius* 1–2. Clement goes as far as to consider the doctrine of the Holy Trinity as foreshadowed in pagan philosophy (*Strom.* VI.14.102–103). See further Chapter 2, pp. 75, 139.
- 19 Butterworth (1916: 205).
- 20 Longinus (Porphyry, *V.P.* 14.18), Porphyry (Proclus, *Plat. Theol.* I.11; 232F Smith), and Damascius wrote works with the same title. Only Damascius' work is extant.
- 21 This may be sensed from the negative overtones of the terms *kainon*, *novum* used as a label for the sceptical Academy by Antiochus in the first century BCE (Cicero, *Acad.* I.13–14). Also Plotinus accuses the Gnostic Christians of *kainotomia* (*Enn.* II.9.6.11).
- 22 Eusebius, for instance, stresses the disagreement between pagan philosophy and Christianity in *Preparatio Evangelica* XIV and XV, which, in his view, resulted from pagan philosophers distancing themselves from the best of ancient philosophy, the work of Plato, who gives voice to the *logos* that also guides Christianity (*P.E.* XI.8.1).
- 23 This becomes most evident in this historical works of Eusebius. As Cameron (1983: 87) says, “The establishment of Christianity as an approved religion and the rule of a Christian emperor implied a reconsideration of all past history and a developed history which

- would provide an explanation in terms of the linear progression of God's promise and its fulfilment." Similar in this regard is Momigliano (1963).
- 24 This is an extensive topic. Besides the studies mentioned in n. 12, see also Nock (1972) and Pelikan (1993).
  - 25 Numenius fr. 10a Des Places (= Origen, *C. Cels.* IV51), Amelius in Eusebius, *P.E.* XI.19.1.
  - 26 Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* books I and V. See further Digeser (2000: 65–72).
  - 27 Cf. Basil, *Hex.* II.6–7 drawing on *Enn.* I.6.1.21–34, Gregory, *On Virginity* 10.2, drawing again on *Enn.* I.6.1. The parallels have been spotted by Henry (1938: 172–173) and Aubineau (1966: 116–118).
  - 28 See Kalligas (2001, 2019). Kalligas convincingly suggests that Eusebius was using an edition closer to the redaction of Amelius that had passed through the hands of Longinus.
  - 29 Paul's letters are dated between about 50 and 65 or 67 CE, while the four Gospels included in the canon of the New Testament canon are usually dated between 70 and 120, first by Mark, then by Matthew, Luke, and, finally, John.
  - 30 See Baltes (1976, 1996).
  - 31 Strato was active in the third century and Boethus in the first century BCE. Strato's fragments are collected by Wehrli (1950: vol. 5). Plotinus, *Enn.* IV.7, and Porphyry, *Against Boethus*, address their (and similar) claims. See further Gottschalk (1987: 1079–1174); Karamanolis (2006: 291–295).
  - 32 See Plato, *Phaed.* 95c (the human soul is god-like, *theoeidēs*), *Theaet.* 176ab, *Tim.* 90cd; Aristotle, *N.E.* 1177b27–31, *Parts of Animals* 686a28–29.
  - 33 The standard work on this topic is that of Le Boulluec (1985). See also Lieu (2015) concerning what seems to be the first major conflict in Christianity, about Marcion.
  - 34 Both kinds of scepticism are covered in the collection of Bett (2010). For the revival of Academic scepticism in the first century CE, see also Opsomer (1998).
  - 35 This applies to Descartes and Hume, for instance. See Stroud (1984); Audi (2003: esp. 315–316).
  - 36 See, e.g., Galen, *On the Best Method of Teaching* I.42 (CMG V.1.1, 94.14–18, I. 48–49, 102.10–104.2) and *On Antecedent Causes* 6.55–56; comments in Hankinson (2008: 162–165).
  - 37 On Numenius and his treatise against the Academy, see Karamanolis (2013a).
  - 38 Sextus Empiricus, *P.H.* I.24, 3.2.
  - 39 The last editor, M. Marcovich, doubted Athenagoras' authorship but not the date (end of the second century).
  - 40 Augustine engages with the views of the sceptical Academy, which he knows through Cicero's *Academica*, in his *Contra Academicos* (written around 386–387).
  - 41 *P.E.* II.7.1, XI proem.3, XI.8.1, 11. XIII.14.3.
  - 42 See, e.g., Clement, *Strom.* VI.15.125.3, VII.16.96.1; see further Chapters 1 and 3.
  - 43 Acts 17:32–33; Origen, *C. Cels.* V.14; Porphyry, *Against the Christians* fr. 35 Harnack. See Chapter 5.
  - 44 It is notoriously difficult to define religion. For a discussion, see Sharpe (1983), esp. 33–48.
  - 45 Zachhuber (2021: 5) argues well for this point.
  - 46 See now Gregoric and Karamanolis (2020: introduction).
  - 47 Porphyry's treatise *On Statues* and Iamblichus' *On Mysteries* are important works in this area.
  - 48 See Iamblichus, *On Mysteries* V.4.11–18, *Life of Pythagoras* 24.107 and Porphyry's critical stance to Iamblichus' views in *On Abstinence* II.3.1, II.26.5.
  - 49 Tertullian, *Apol.* 39, 46.2 and *De pallio* 6.4; Lactantius, *De ira Dei* 7.13 and *De opif. Dei* I.2, where he speaks of the "*philosophi sectae nostrae*". For more discussion, see Chapter 1.
  - 50 See, for instance, Plotinus, *Enn.* V.1.6.4–11, Porphyry, *On Abstinence* II.34.1–5, Iamblichus, *On Mysteries* V.26. pp. 177–178 Saffrey-Segonds. See further Timotin (2017) and Hoffmann and Timotin (2020).
  - 51 See, e.g., Brown (1971: 70–94, esp. 78–; 1995); Clark (2004: 27–37). This had already been suggested by ancient critics of Christianity such as Celsus (*C. Cels.* III.55), who claimed that Christian doctrines appealed only to the less educated.

## 26 Introduction

- 52 The expansion of Christianity has been the subject matter of several studies. See the classic study by Harnack (1908); also Chadwick (1967: ch. 3) and Fox (1986: 265–335).
- 53 Severus' persecution is documented by Eusebius *H.E.* VI.1 and *Historia Augusta* Life of Severus XVII.1. See Grégoire (1951), Sherwin-White (1952). Diocletian's great persecution has now been studied afresh by Shin (2018).
- 54 Gibbon (1840: vol. I, 39).
- 55 Dodds (1965).
- 56 See Pietzner (2013).
- 57 See Männlein-Robert (2019).
- 58 See Haas (1997), Cuomo (2000).
- 59 See Anderson (1933) and, more recently, Whitmarsh (2005).
- 60 See Barnes (1971: 186–210).
- 61 On the relation between Christianity and Judaism, see Segal (1986: esp. 163–182). The Christian anti-Jewish polemic is discussed by Simon (1986: 135–178).
- 62 Literature on Gnosticism is rich but rarely speaks about the philosophical dimension of the Gnostic views. Two important fairly recent studies, which represent different approaches, are Williams (1996) and King (2003).
- 63 Harnack (1924) argues against Marcion's Gnostic identity; Bianchi (1967: 141–149), among others, argues in favour of it. Such debate shows that Gnosticism is a vague phenomenon.
- 64 See Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* I.10.3, I.6.1, II.16.3, III.3.23; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I.25.1, I.27.2.
- 65 On Valentinus' cosmology, see Quispel (1996: 349–351); Thomassen (2006); Williams (1996: 14–18).
- 66 See Daniélou (1963: 143–146); Gager (1972: 53–59).
- 67 On the use of myth by the Gnostics, see Marksches (2009: 83–112).
- 68 Plotinus contrasts the Gnostic approach and his own way of philosophizing, arguing that his is characterized, among other things, by clarity of thought, simplicity and caution (*Enn.* II.9.14.40–45).
- 69 On this issue, see Simon (1979).
- 70 On the Christian school in Alexandria and the main Christian Alexandrians, see Bigg (1913).
- 71 See Quispel (1947).
- 72 Philo's allegorical interpretation permeates his work but is especially evident in his *Allegories of the Laws*. See Kamesar (2009). From the Hellenic philosophers, see Longinus in Proclus, *In Tim.* I.83.19–24, Plotinus, *Enn.* IV8.1.23–28, and also Porphyry, *On the Cave of Nymphs*, 20–21; Philoponus, *De aeternitate mundi* 638.14–639.4.
- 73 See Dillon (1989b: 50–72).
- 74 On Origen's methods of interpretation, see Torjesen (1986); Edwards (2003; 2008; 2018: 75–84); Fürst (2011). For the cultural background in Alexandria, see Dawson (1992).
- 75 Cf. Wolfson (1970a: vol. I).
- 76 See, for instance, Trigg (1985); Osborn (2005).
- 77 See, for instance, Cherniss (1930: esp. 62); Spanneut (1957); Ivanka (1964); Clark (1977); Wyrwa (1983); Siniosoglou (2008). I do not claim, however, that all these works exhibit the same approach, let alone that they are not important.
- 78 The first was claimed by Antiochus of Ascalon (Cicero, *De fin.* V.22, V.88–89), while the claim against the Epicureans was made by Plutarch in his *Against Colotes* 1108E–F.
- 79 Athanasius does this in his *Epistula de decretis Nicaeni synodi*, written c. 351–352. The Council of Nicaea was only retrospectively termed “ecumenical”.

# 1

## THE CHRISTIAN CONCEPTION OF PHILOSOPHY AND CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHICAL METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

The attitude of early Christian thinkers towards philosophy is marked by an apparent contradiction. On the one hand they voice strong criticism and even contempt of philosophy, claiming that philosophy is full of false views, many of which lead to heresies (Tatian, *Or.* 2, 19, 25; Tertullian, *Apol.* 46.18),<sup>1</sup> while on the other they repeatedly define Christianity as philosophy and employ recognizable philosophical arguments to vindicate their positions. Justin (*Dial.* 8.1–2) declares that Christianity is philosophy and indeed the perfection of philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Later Christians continue on the same track; they speak of Christianity as “the true philosophy”, the “highest philosophy”, “the philosophy of Christ”, or the “philosophy according to the divine tradition”.<sup>3</sup> Of course, there are several varieties of this attitude among early Christian thinkers. Justin, Clement, and Origen are more sympathetic to philosophy and more assertive of the philosophical character of Christianity than Tatian, Tertullian, or Athanasius. It seems to me, however, that the difference in their views is not a matter of substance but of degree. As we shall see below, all sides agree that philosophy is untrustworthy and Christianity is the true or real philosophy that alone should be trusted.

It is impossible, however, both to criticize *X* and to praise something as *X* unless *X* is used in two different senses. The term “philosophy” can indeed be understood in two senses, either as “love of knowledge” or “pursuit of truth” or “the pursuit of philosophy in the Graeco-Roman, pagan world”. It is perfectly conceivable for one to reject philosophy in the latter sense, which I call “Hellenic philosophy”, while approving of philosophy in the former. In such a case, one rejects as unsatisfactory a certain tradition of pursuing the truth, namely Hellenic philosophy, while affirming the task of pursuing the truth in some other way.

One case that comes to mind here is that of the Pyrrhonian sceptics. They draw an especially sharp distinction between philosophy as practised by all other schools

of philosophy in the Graeco-Roman world and their own approach; indeed, they speak of the former as “so-called philosophy” (Sextus Empiricus, *PH.* I.18, II.12). The reason they give for such a sharp distinction is that all traditional philosophical sects without exception had, in their opinion, betrayed the true character of philosophy, which, they believe, consists in the aporetic spirit that motivates unceasing enquiry and leads to the suspension of judgement. They claim that this aporetic aspect of philosophy is preserved only in scepticism, that is, in Pyrrhonian scepticism – and for that reason, they argue, only this form of scepticism qualifies as philosophy.

The case of Christianity seems similar to me. Like the sceptics, early Christian thinkers consider the Hellenic tradition of philosophy a failure, but they endorse the aim of that tradition, which is the pursuit of the truth and achievement of wisdom; and for this reason they claim that they do philosophy and do it quite successfully. Of course, much depends here on how early Christian thinkers conceive of this aim. It may well be the case that we are dealing with two different ways of doing philosophy, such as the sceptical and the dogmatic, exemplified in the opposition between the Pyrrhonian and all other ancient philosophical schools, but it may also be the case that Christian “philosophy” exists only nominally and that at the end it differs substantially from the Hellenic understanding of philosophy. Both options have their supporters in scholarship,<sup>4</sup> and there is evidence supporting both sides. On the one hand, we have Justin, who does not distinguish between the Platonic, Stoic, Pythagorean, and Christian practices of philosophy. Yet, on the other hand, we have the fourth-century Christian uses of the term *philosophia* in the sense of “ascetic or monastic life”,<sup>5</sup> that is, in a sense completely different from that employed in pagan antiquity. In order to come to a conclusion on this matter, we need to investigate the conception of philosophy held by early Christian thinkers. And, in order to do so, we first need to closely examine the grounds on which early Christian philosophers criticize Hellenic philosophy. We then need to consider how Christians speak of Christianity as philosophy and what exactly they mean by this.

### The Christian rejection of Hellenic philosophy

The dualism with regard to philosophy described above is prevalent in the work of Christian thinkers such as Tatian and Tertullian, who are particularly critical of Hellenic philosophy. In a work as short as Tatian’s *Oration Against the Greeks*, we count three separate attacks against philosophy, which Tatian considers part of Hellenic culture, just like mythology, religion, and drama (*Or.* 2, 19, 25). Tatian sets out to reject Hellenic philosophy in order to defend Christianity, which he describes as “our philosophy” (31) or “the barbarian one” (42). This becomes plain when he compares the two and affirms the superiority of Christianity on the grounds that the former is accessible to everyone (32),<sup>6</sup> and because it is more ancient and accurate than Hellenic philosophy (35–41). One may ask at this point whether Tatian’s understanding of Christianity as philosophy is similar to that of philosophy in the Hellenic tradition – that is, roughly speaking, as an enquiry that

aims to demonstrate its claims by rational means – or whether we are dealing with mere homonymy here.

If the latter were the case, however, it would be difficult to explain why Tatian finds Hellenic philosophy comparable with Christianity at all. Another piece of evidence is quite relevant here. Tatian adduces his personal example in his argument for the superiority of Christianity, telling us that, before he converted to Christianity, he had been a philosopher of some repute (1.3), presumably a Platonist, like his teacher Justin.<sup>7</sup> Tatian presumably implies that his conversion from Hellenic philosophy to Christianity amounts to making progress in philosophy. Such a point would be impossible for him to make if the similarity between the two kinds of philosophy were for him only nominal.

This is even clearer in the case of another ardent Christian critic of philosophy, Tertullian. Following the admonition of Paul,<sup>8</sup> Tertullian condemns Hellenic philosophy quite strongly in many places in his work, especially in *Apologeticum* 46–50, in *De praescriptione haereticorum* 7–9, and in *De anima* 1–3.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, Tertullian reverses the argument of Plato's *Gorgias* against sophistry; he accuses Hellenic philosophy of strongly inclining towards sophistry (*Apol.* 46.18) and rhetoric (*Res.* 5.1), and he also blames philosophers for inconsistency (*De spectaculis* 21.1), for disagreeing with each other (*De anima* 2.4), and for holding and propagating false views on which the heretics draw. The latter charge recurs emphatically in Tertullian's work. In *De anima*, for instance, Tertullian starts his account of the soul by taking issue with the psychology of Plato's *Phaedo*. Tertullian criticizes Plato for maintaining the eternal existence of the soul and its transmigration to other bodies and concludes, albeit with regret, that Plato is responsible for the propagation of a false view regarding the soul, on which the Gnostics in particular draw (*De an.* 23.5–24.1, 28.1–2). Furthermore, in *Against Hermogenes* Tertullian blames Stoicism for the view of Hermogenes that matter exists eternally and is a principle of what is (see esp. *Adv. Herm.* 8.3; cf. *De an.* 3.1), a view that he criticizes at length. The following passage is characteristic of Tertullian's attitude:

The heresies themselves rise from philosophy. From there come the aeons and the infinite forms and the triple nature of man in Valentinus; he is a Platonist. From there Marcion's God, who is better because he is in a state of tranquillity; he venerates the Stoics. And it is said that the soul perishes, as Epicurus suggested. They reject the resurrection of the body, and this is granted by no school of all the schools of philosophy. When they equate matter with God, this is Zeno's school of thought. Where they read something about the fiery God, it is because of Heraclitus. It is the same material which heretics and philosophers recycle and when they retrieve it they do that for the same purpose.

(*De praescriptione haereticorum* 7.3–4)

The association of heresies with Hellenic philosophy is a recurring theme in other early Christian thinkers as well.<sup>10</sup> Not all of them go as far as Tertullian, who

concludes the above argument by rhetorically asking what Athens has to do with Jerusalem and what the Academy has in common with the Christian Church (*Praescr.* 7.9). These rhetorical questions should not be taken, however, as implying that Tertullian sees no connection whatsoever between Hellenic philosophy and Christianity, or that the two are opposites.<sup>11</sup> For, although on the one hand Tertullian explicitly rejects Platonism and Stoicism, on the other hand he argues, like Justin (*Dial.* 2.1), that philosophical reasoning points to God (*Adv. Marc.* II.87.6), the source of reason (*De an.* 16.2). Tertullian also seems to imply that Hellenic philosophy represents a progress of reason in history, the perfection and fulfilment of which came with Christianity (*Testimonium Animae* 5.6–7). Besides, Tertullian often points out that (Hellenic) philosophy and Christianity agree on many points, for instance, on God's being invisible, peaceful, and beyond human comprehension (*Adv. Marc.* II.27.6), as well as on the immortality of the soul (*Testimonium Animae* 4.1–8). He claims, however, that Christianity surpassed Hellenic philosophy; hence, he suggests, Christianity is a better philosophy (*De Pallio* 6.4).<sup>12</sup> And in *Apologeticum* (46.2) he addresses the objection that Christianity is a form of religion by replying that it is a kind of philosophy (*philosophiae genus*), and he goes on to ask why Christianity is persecuted. From this evidence it can be gleaned that, despite his strong criticism of Hellenic philosophy, Tertullian does maintain a link between it and Christianity by stressing their common aim and method, with the difference between them lying in the degree of success in achieving that aim.

Similar denouncements of Hellenic philosophy in favour of Christianity occur in several other early Christian thinkers. Clement presents Hellenic philosophy as foolish or childish (*Strom.* I.10.50.1, 11.53.2, 17.88.1), despite his praise of Plato (on which more below, pp. 31–32). Lactantius praises Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato for resisting the doctrine of atomists and for affirming the creation of the world by God and for maintaining divine providence (*De ira Dei* 10.47), yet in conclusion he castigates Hellenic philosophy as *vaniloquentia* (vain eloquence), on the grounds that it does not share the Christian conception of God, which involves the belief that God is angered by those who live unjustly (24.1). In his *Divine Institutions* in particular, Lactantius claims that philosophy, despite the efforts of many great minds, has erred, that is, it has not arrived at the truth that Christianity articulated (*Div. Inst.* III.30).<sup>13</sup> Also, Basil in his *Homilies in Hexameron* denounces the knowledge of Hellenic philosophy in favour of that of Scripture, and Gregory of Nyssa considers “outside philosophy” (*exōthen philosophia*) or “outside education” (*exōthen paideusis*) useless (*Vita Mosis* 329B, 336D, 337B), despite the fact that in the same treatise he describes his theological work as the “sacred offspring” (*eusebēs tokos*) of Hellenic philosophy. Once again, however, these judgements do not amount to a rejection of Hellenic philosophy as a whole; as is the case with Tertullian, the same Christian critics also express their respect, or even praise, for philosophy, often in the same context where the criticisms occur. Clement in particular, as we shall see in the next section, considers Christianity a kind of philosophy, as does also Gregory, who, as we will see in more detail below, claims that Hellenic philosophy can be beneficial when its

“tainted” parts are removed (*Vita Mosis* 336D–337A). But let us first look closer at the Christian criticisms of Hellenic philosophy.

## The Christian criticism of Hellenic philosophy

We should now move from the rhetorical generalizations and exaggerations that characterize the Christian rejection of Hellenic philosophy to reconstructing their concrete views about it. Early Christians claim that Hellenic philosophers hold many false doctrines, which they often specify: the denial of divine providence, maintained by Epicurus; the corporeality of God, espoused by the Stoics; the mortality of the soul that was advocated by Aristotle – these are often criticized as false doctrines by Christians. As I have said above, however, the Christians themselves agreed that on many points Hellenic philosophers had hit upon the truth, but they disagree among themselves as to what these points are. Plato’s philosophy, for instance, is considered close to the Christian truth, and is thus respected (explicitly by Clement and Eusebius), but sometimes Plato is also severely criticized (by Tertullian or Gregory of Nyssa).

More specifically, in the *Protrepticus* Clement claims that Plato is a reliable guide to the search for God, and he refers us first to *Timaeus* 28c, where Plato suggests that it is impossible to speak about God (*Protr.* 6.68). In what follows, Clement refers to *Timaeus* 52a, where God is said to be one, uncreated, and incorruptible; to (Plato’s) second *Letter* (312e), where God is defined as the cause of all goods; and to *Phaedo* 78d, where God is said to always be the same, beyond any change (*Protr.* 6.68.2–69.1). A similar argument is found in the *Stromateis*. Clement first speaks about the ineffability of God, referring to (Plato’s) second *Letter* (312D; *Strom.* V.10.65.1–3), then points to the view presented in the seventh *Letter* (341cd) that the soul is able to illuminate herself (*Strom.* V.10.66.3), and a little further on he highlights Socrates’ conception of philosophy as the practice of death (*melētē thanatou*; *Phaed.* 81a; *Strom.* V.10.67.1). In this context Clement calls Plato a “friend of truth” (*Strom.* V.10.66.3), clearly because he regards Plato’s views on God and the immortality and knowledge of the soul as similar to the relevant Christian views.

It is on similar grounds that Eusebius praises Plato’s philosophy as the one that is mostly true.<sup>14</sup> Eusebius, however, is uncompromising in his rejection of Hellenic philosophy, despite his admiration for Plato (*P.E.* XI.8.1). His main argument, which permeates his *Preparation for the Gospel*, is that Hellenic philosophers disagree on almost every significant issue, and he takes this disagreement as evidence of the failure of Hellenic philosophy (*P.E.* II.6.22). This argument is very widespread among early Christian thinkers, but it is not of Christian origin. Within Christianity we trace it back to Tatian, Tertullian, Clement, and in ps-Justin’s *Exhortation to the Greeks*; we also find it later in Athanasius (*De incarn.* 50).

What kind of argument is this? After all, it is possible that one school of philosophy arrives at the correct view that the rest reject, and disagreement arises as a result. The Christians point to this possibility when the same argument is turned against them (see pp. 32–33), but they nevertheless use it against



### 32 The Christian conception of philosophy

Hellenic philosophy, despite the fact that they treat the philosophy of Plato and of Epicurus very differently, considering the former a friend of the truth and the latter a foe (see pp. 36–37). For the Christians, however, even Plato was not entirely right, although they disagree on what exactly Plato's mistakes were. It does not matter, however. The fact that Plato ignored the Christian God, which Christians hold to be the highest principle of reality, amounts to a failure that in their opinion affects his entire philosophy and accounts for false views, such as the pre-existence of matter, the transmigration of the soul (*P.E.* XIII.6), and the view that God is without affections, like anger, as Lactantius claims in *De ira Dei*. It is in this sense that Christian thinkers perceive the whole of Hellenic philosophy as essentially misguided, although they acknowledge degrees of failure in it. And they refer to the disagreement between Hellenic philosophers as evidence of that failure.

Christians repeat an argument originally advanced by ancient sceptics. We find it first used by Academic sceptics against the Stoics; the claim is that the dogmatic epistemology of the latter is not credible.<sup>15</sup> The argument recurs later in Pyrrhonian scepticism, which, as I said in the Introduction, is revived in the second century CE with Sextus Empiricus (c. 160–210). Sextus repeatedly (e.g. *P.H.* II.12, II.85, III.34) highlights the disagreement within the so-called dogmatic philosophy, which includes practically all established schools of philosophy.<sup>16</sup> Sextus finds their approach collectively mistaken in that they assumed that true or secure knowledge is attainable by the human mind and that the task of philosophy is precisely to attain it. Sextus disputes the existence of a criterion by means of which we can decide which knowledge is true and which not (*P.H.* II.7–8), and he claims that the disagreement between the dogmatist philosophers manifests the lack of such a criterion (*A.M.* II.11).

Although early Christians considered the sceptical tradition of philosophy a threat and distanced themselves from it – the claim to truth made by Christians was disputed by the sceptics as an impossible cognitive state (see Chapter 3, pp. 106–111) – they took up the sceptical argument of disagreement (i.e. that disagreement among philosophers is an indication of their ignorance and thus of failure in philosophy) and used it alongside the Pyrrhoneans against Hellenic philosophy.<sup>17</sup> While for the Pyrrhoneans this happens because the truth is unattainable, this is the case for the Christians because the truth is identical with the *Logos*, the Christian God's wisdom, which at best was only partly known in Hellenic philosophy (Clement, *Strom.* I.16.80.5–6, I.17.87.2). For the Christians the disagreement among Hellenic philosophers is evidence of their dissatisfaction with the views of their own tradition and hence a sign of failure. As I mentioned above, the Christian argument was turned back on them by the Hellenic side, which claimed that Christians also disagree among themselves and are also divided into sects. The Christians replied that there are good and bad Christians, like good and bad physicians, but we seek the good ones when we are ill; similarly, when we suffer from diseases of the soul we turn to those who have the truth, that is, to the ancient church (Clement, *Strom.* VII.15.89.1–92.4; see further Ch. 3, pp. 106–107).

What is crucial here is not so much the Christian answer, but rather the Christian assumption that Christianity is marked by finality and perfection, in comparison with which the Hellenic tradition of philosophy is considered rudimentary, imperfect, and untrustworthy. Christians assume and often explicitly claim that the search for the truth, which is the aim of philosophy, started with the Hellenic philosophers but was fulfilled only by Christianity, and the mark of this fulfilment is the recognition of the true God, that is, the Christian God.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, Christians claim that only Christianity deserves to be called philosophy because only Christianity attained the truth.

This Christian idea is intriguing. It establishes not merely the superiority of Christianity over Hellenic philosophy but also a certain connection between the two. One aspect of this connection is that the representatives of both traditions conceive of Hellenic philosophy as consisting in finding the truth by means of reason. Christianity was deeply concerned with presenting itself not as a mere religion, cult, or ideology but as a rational enterprise and indeed as the culmination of rational enquiry which had begun with Hellenic philosophy. Clement's analogy with the art of medicine mentioned above indicates precisely this; it aims to underline both the rational basis and beneficial aim of Christianity. There is some tension, however, between the Christian claim that Christianity is the culmination of the rational enquiry of Hellenic philosophy and their claim that only Christianity deserves the name of philosophy, since the Christians themselves often admit that Hellenic philosophy also seeks the truth and does so by rational means, and sometimes hits it as well.<sup>19</sup>

Christians have a specific conception of truth, however. For them the discovery of truth came about through revelation, namely the revelation of the *Logos* (see, e.g., Clement, *Strom.* I.20.98.4, VI.14.111.1). This is not the way Hellenic philosophers regard philosophy, as Christians themselves acknowledge (Clement, *Strom.* I.19.94.6 - I.20.99.2). If we consider Plato or Aristotle, for instance, philosophy is for them an enquiry into reality and the search for true knowledge we achieve through the understanding of the causes involved.<sup>20</sup> Very often ancient philosophers invest considerable energy in presenting us with a puzzle (*aporia*), and they often remain aporetic as to how a question should be solved or even approached, despite their efforts to overcome the aporetic state.<sup>21</sup> Tertullian differs strikingly from this point of view when he claims that the Gospel is the end of our enquiry and cannot be improved but only better understood.

Let them beware those who put forward a Stoic, Platonic, dialectical form of Christianity. For us there is no need of curiosity after Christ, no need of enquiry after the Gospel. When we have believed, we have no desire to add to our faith. For this is our primary faith that there is nothing further which we ought to believe.

(*Praescr.* 7.11–13)

Tertullian was not the exception but rather the rule on this issue. Lactantius, for instance, defends a similar point of view throughout book 3 of his *Divine Institutions*.

Although there are differences in tone, early Christian philosophers unanimously point to the finality and perfection of Christianity, which means that, however close any philosopher of the Hellenic tradition came to it, he is still short of the perfection of Christianity.

Two questions arise here. First, how compatible is the Christian view that considers truth as revelation with the Christian respect for philosophy as pursued by the Hellenic schools? Second, how acceptable is the Christian claim that Christianity qualifies as philosophy, if by this the attainment of truth through revelation is basically meant? As I have mentioned above, for the original, Hellenic, character of philosophy consisted in an investigation that started with a puzzle or with puzzlement (*aporia*), involved considering the options and the opinions hitherto expressed, and offered an argument in support of a certain thesis, which was seen as one that overcomes the state of puzzlement. To answer these questions, we need to look carefully into the early Christian idea of the revelation and operation of *Logos* in the world.

### Christianity as the revelation of *Logos*

The idea that Christianity is the revelation of *Logos* (reason, wisdom) surfaces in the work of the earliest Christian philosopher, Justin. Concerned with showing how Hellenic philosophy and Christianity relate to one another, Justin argues that Christianity is the fulfilment of *Logos*, which is embodied in Christ and had always been present in the world, responsible for the “seeds of truth among all human beings” (1 *Apol.* 44.10). Further, Justin suggests that “those who lived with *Logos* are<sup>22</sup> Christians even if they were considered atheists, such as, among the Greeks, Socrates, Heraclitus, and similar philosophers, and among the barbarians Abraham, Ananias, Azarias, Misael, and Elijah” (1 *Apol.* 46.3). Justin claims that Socrates in particular was a Christian living before Christ, since he lived in accordance with the *Logos* (1 *Apol.* 46.3), and by recognizing the *Logos* he partly recognized Christ (2 *Apol.* 10.8; cf. 7.3).<sup>23</sup> Plato, Justin contends, also had access to the *Logos*, albeit an incomplete one, by reading the books of Moses (1 *Apol.* 59.1–60.7). It is no wonder, then, that Justin considers Hellenic philosophy to be a precious gift from God to mankind (*Dial.* 2.1).<sup>24</sup>

Justin supports his argument of the gradual revelation of the *Logos* to mankind with his own personal story. In the *Dialogue with Trypho* Justin tells us that, before converting to Christianity, he had acquainted himself with almost all philosophical schools; he had been instructed by Stoics, Peripatetics, Pythagoreans, and, finally, Platonists (*Dial.* 2.2–6; cf. *Acta Iustini* A 2.3, B 2.3). In his *Second Apology* he claims that he used to be content with Plato’s philosophy before his conversion to Christianity.<sup>25</sup> All this may well be fiction, and at any rate it should not be taken at face value.<sup>26</sup> This, however, does not diminish the significance of Justin’s story. It was usual among his contemporaries to study in many schools of philosophy. Galen, for instance, studied in four schools of philosophy, and Plotinus had several teachers before arriving at the school of Ammonius, who satisfied his inquisitive spirit.<sup>27</sup>

Justin's main point was to show that he had always been a follower of rational enquiry, that he had been trained in argument, and that rational enquiry reaches its perfection in Christianity, to which he finally converted. It is such a view that motivates Christian philosophers to appreciate and respect Hellenic philosophy to some degree and to consider it, at least partly, compatible with Christianity.

The doctrine of *Logos* shared by all human races and which motivates progress in mankind is not Justin's invention but rather characteristic of his time. A form of it goes back to the Stoics. We find it in Posidonius and in Chaeremon and Cornutus in the first century CE.<sup>28</sup> The doctrine gains currency, however, in the second century CE with the Platonists Numenius and Celsus. They take the view that truth or wisdom was disseminated to all of civilized mankind and was preserved by various ancient nations, such as the Egyptians, the Babylonians, and the Persians.<sup>29</sup> One view shared by all beneficiaries of the true account is that there exists one God who is responsible for the order and stability of the world and that this God is incorporeal.<sup>30</sup> Celsus points this out in his treatise "True Account" (*Alēthēs Logos*), where he criticizes the Christians for, among other things, their abandonment of the ancient true account in favour of the barbarian doctrines of the Jewish culture. In his reply to Celsus, Origen instead claims that the Christians had never abandoned the *Logos*, as Celsus argued, but had on the contrary fulfilled it.

Christian and Hellenic philosophers apparently agree that the *Logos* operates throughout history in the form of a widespread true account and on the idea that this true account is not identical with a certain philosophy or philosophical school but is rather articulated in different ways by different people. They disagree, however, about its beneficiaries. Numenius suggests that in the Hellenic tradition the *Logos* was channelled through Pythagorean philosophy, on which Plato himself drew (Numenius fr. 24 Des Places (=Eusebius, *PE*. XIV.4.16–59)), and he further claims that the Egyptian, Jewish, and Christian traditions also had a share in *Logos*. This is confirmed by the fact that Numenius appears to conflate the highest God of Plato with "he who is" (ὁ ὄν) of Exodus 3.14 (Eusebius, *PE*. XI.18; fr. 13 Des Places); and he goes so far as to say that Plato is nothing other than Moses speaking Attic Greek (Clement, *Strom.* I.21.150.4; Eusebius, *PE*. XI.10 (= Numenius fr. 8 Des Places)), and that Plato also refers to Jesus, albeit in unclear terms (Origen, *C. Cels.* IV.51; Numenius fr. 10a Des Places). Celsus, on the other hand, excludes the Christian tradition from the recipients of *Logos*, which is why Origen sides with and appeals to Numenius in replying to Celsus.

The agreement between Numenius and his Christian admirers, Origen and Eusebius, is, however, more limited than the latter want us to believe, because for the Christians the revelation of *Logos* does not merely amount to the diffusion of some theological views to mankind, such as the view that God is responsible for the world order, but rather corresponds to the operation and, especially, the revelation in the world of the person of Christ, the Son of God, who represents God's wisdom. This is quite different, of course, from the Platonist and Stoic idea of primordial wisdom, which explains why Celsus points out that the Christian idea

of *Logos* as the Son of God is seriously at odds with the Hellenic idea of *Logos* (*C. Cels.* II.31).

Celsus' point is not unfair. The difference, however, between Christianity and the Hellenic tradition should not obscure their common ground in this regard, which consists in the idea that philosophy amounts to articulating universal truth or wisdom and reaches its final point when this is achieved. Numenius, who shares this view of philosophy and maintains that Plato had access to *Logos*, stresses the completeness and perfection of Plato's philosophy, criticizing all those who diverged from it, namely Peripatetics, Stoics, and even Platonists themselves.<sup>31</sup> Numenius' contemporary, Atticus, also emphasizes the perfection and finality of Plato's philosophy (Atticus fr. 1 Des Places (=Eusebius, *P.E.* XI.1)).<sup>32</sup> The Christian view of philosophy is similar; Christianity is deemed to be the perfection of wisdom/*Logos*. It is telling that both Atticus and Clement point to the finality of Hellenic philosophy and Christianity respectively using the same analogy of Pentheus' dismembered body, which illustrates the division of philosophy into branches, whose unity was allegedly restored by Plato and Christianity, respectively (Atticus fr. 1 Des Places, Clement, *Strom.* I.12.57.1–6). In Clement's use of the analogy, though, the members of truth correspond to the sects (*haireseis*) of Hellenic philosophy, not to parts of philosophy, as in Atticus (*Strom.* I.12.57.1).

Clement takes Justin's view that Hellenic philosophy represents a partial revelation of the *Logos* a step further, claiming that Hellenic philosophy is one of the two ancient God-given gifts to mankind,<sup>33</sup> the other being the Old Testament. Clement indeed suggests that both Jewish law and Hellenic philosophy are revelations, direct and indirect, respectively, of God's will, and are partially true, serving as preparatory education (*propaideia*) for the Christian message.<sup>34</sup> Philosophy, Clement says, is the path (*hodos*) that God gave to pagans to assist them in their search for truth (*Strom.* VI.14.110.3–111.1), which Clement identifies with the Christian God (111.1). Furthermore, Clement claims that philosophy, thus conceived, is a rudimentary guide (*stoicheiōtikē*) to the perfect science of intelligibles, which is Christianity;<sup>35</sup> it is therefore beneficial for Christians, too. Clement, however, remarks that the Christian philosopher, the true Gnostic in Clement's terms, should be selective with respect to Hellenic philosophy:

With regard to philosophy, I do not mean the Stoic or Platonic or Epicurean and Aristotelian, but all those things said well by each of these schools, namely the things that teach justice along with pious knowledge; this entire selective attitude (*eklektikon*) I call philosophy.

(*Strom.* I.7.37.6)<sup>36</sup>

Several things about this statement are striking. The first is that Clement identifies philosophy with the set of true doctrines espoused by Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and even the Epicureans, whose philosophy the Christians rejected almost in its entirety, mainly because of the Epicurean denial of divine providence.<sup>37</sup> Clement does not specify what these true doctrines amount to. He marks them, however,

as indisputable (*adiablēta dogmata*) and speaks of philosophy as “an apprehension that is secure and unchanging” (*katalēpsin tina bebaian kai ametaptōton*; *Strom.* VI.6.55.3), a phrase recasting the Stoic description of apprehension (*katalēpsis*; Zeno *SVF* I.20, I.50).

The similarity with Stoicism goes further. Not only does Clement claim that philosophy consists in maintaining and propagating doctrines that hold true, but he adds that it also consists in a life in accordance with reason (*homologoumenos bios*).<sup>38</sup> Elsewhere Clement makes clear that these two aspects are inextricably linked with each other; philosophy, Clement says, is “wisdom with skill” (*sophia technikē*; *Strom.* VI.6.54.1), and he explains that by this phrase he means the kind of knowledge that is both practical and theoretical; such knowledge, he says, both serves as a guide to happiness, as it is associated with the practice of justice (II.10.47.4), and teaches us about human and divine matters (VI.6.54.1–55.3). And elsewhere he defines philosophy as “improvement of our soul” (*psychēs veltiotikē*) in the same way that medicine is an improvement of our body (*Strom.* VII.1.2.3.1). Clement’s conception of philosophy turns out to be similar to that of the Stoics insofar as it consists in knowledge or understanding that is of both theoretical and practical character. Let me remind ourselves here of two Stoic definitions of philosophy: they define it as “the practice of an expertise” or as “the striving for the goal that wisdom has set”.<sup>39</sup>

Clement’s leaning toward the Stoic view of philosophy is hardly accidental; it is rather an aspect of his opposition to the conception of philosophy that contemporary scepticism advocates, as we shall see in more detail in Chapter 3. In that respect Clement is not alone. Early Christian thinkers were concerned with the sceptical dispute about the attainability of true knowledge, which was prevalent in the second century CE. Athenagoras, for instance, thus speaks against those who argue that next to truth there are always false doctrines too.

This is why I believe that we need a discourse consisting of two parts, one that defends truth and one that illustrates it (*tōn men hyper tēs alētheias, tōn de peri tēs alētheias*). In the first one we need to defend the truth against those who do not believe and those who raise doubts, while in the second we will illustrate the truth to those favourably disposed and were inclined towards accepting the truth.

(*On Resurrection* 1.3)

From what follows in Athenagoras’ work, it becomes clear that he takes a view (which can be traced back to Plato) according to which one needs to clear the territory of doubt and also of false belief before being able to establish the truth.<sup>40</sup> Those predisposed to doubt everything, such as the Pyrrhonian sceptics, must be disarmed before the truth can be illustrated. Also, those who hold false beliefs must abandon them if progress in the enquiry is to be made. This is actually the message in many of Plato’s dialogues (such as in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*).

To come back to Clement, his concern with scepticism becomes manifest when he says that philosophy crucially involves the ability to discriminate right from

wrong. He appeals to Plato's *Gorgias*, where Socrates draws a line between philosophy and sophistry, arguing that we need to distinguish true from false in the same way that we distinguish medicine from cookery.<sup>41</sup> Noticeably, Clement takes the Socratic position of advocating philosophy, while Tertullian, as we have seen, reverses this argument against philosophy by identifying it with sophistry (*Apol.* 46.18) and rhetoric (*Res.* 5.1). Clement also takes up the Socratic (and later Stoic) position while claiming that the knowledge provided by philosophy enables us to distinguish right from wrong. It is in this sense that Clement finds Hellenic philosophy valuable for Christianity – as an instrument that guides us to truth and shields us from falsehood.

A clear example of Hellenic philosophy discerning the truth is the predilection of Hellenic philosophers for monotheism, which Clement stresses and relates to the prophetic books of the Old Testament (*Strom.* V.14).<sup>42</sup> It turns out that Clement links Christianity to Hellenic philosophy not only on the basis of the operation of *Logos* throughout history, but also in virtue of sharing a common attitude to philosophy, which consists, as we have seen in the passages cited above, in the discrimination, selection, and endorsement of what is true. Such selection and endorsement can also apply to philosophical views. An openly expressed eclecticism was rare among philosophers in antiquity;<sup>43</sup> they rather belonged to specific schools of thought and they used to openly affirm their allegiance. This, however, was precisely what the Christian thinkers wanted to deny from the start. Justin denied allegiance to Platonism, Peripateticism, Pythagoreanism, and Stoicism in order to express loyalty only to *Logos*, which, in his view, presents itself completely only in Scripture. Clement's conception of Christianity as an eclectic philosophy must be motivated by the same idea and may well have been inspired by his teacher Pantaenus, who is portrayed as a bee "sampling flowers from the apostolic and prophetic meadows" (*Strom.* I.1.11.2).<sup>44</sup>

An analogous case of someone who presented himself as an eclectic in philosophy is Galen, who is therefore a rare case in ancient philosophy. Galen denied allegiance to any philosophical school and indeed criticized slavish attachment to one or the other,<sup>45</sup> recommending instead the careful selection of what is good from all of them.<sup>46</sup> The analogy between Galen and Christians like Clement holds to the extent that both sides find philosophy as practised within the traditional philosophical schools unsatisfactory and consider the independence from them to be a mark of one's commitment to truth and to critical judgement; this is the point behind their recommendation of eclecticism. However, the analogy also has its limits: Galen and Christians, like Clement, were guided by different understandings of what counts as truth and how it is to be assessed. As we have seen above, for the Christians the discovery of truth amounted to the revelation of the *Logos*.

The idea that Hellenic philosophy is imperfect but nonetheless functions as preparation for the manifestation of the *Logos* in Christianity permeates Eusebius' voluminous *Preparation for the Gospel*. In this work, Eusebius sets out to demonstrate the discord among Hellenic philosophers and their disagreement with Plato in particular, which he takes as evidence of the imperfection of Hellenic philosophy

as a whole.<sup>47</sup> Eusebius argues that Plato's philosophy came close to the truth (*P.E.* XIII.14.3) because Plato distanced himself from ancient theological beliefs (II.7.1, XIII. 1–2) and thus essentially agreed with Christian theological doctrine (XI.13–23). This might seem the opposite of what Clement does, since the latter identifies philosophy with the true doctrines of ancient philosophical schools more generally, while Eusebius stresses what is false in them. The two views are, however, much closer than it first seems. Clement shows a special appreciation for Plato, as also Eusebius later does, and although he is quite appreciative of the entire tradition of Hellenic philosophy, he, like Eusebius, criticizes it as well (*Strom.* I.11.53.2). Furthermore, both Clement and Eusebius share the view that Hellenic philosophy is only partly true along with the conviction, which becomes emblematic in Eusebius' *Preparation for the Gospel*, that Hebrew culture and wisdom antedate the Hellenic one and that the latter draws on the former, to the extent that the Greeks qualify as thieves.<sup>48</sup>

The argument for the dependence of Hellenic philosophy on Hebrew wisdom is found early on in Christian thought, in Justin, Tatian, Theophilus, and Tertullian.<sup>49</sup> Clement, however, maintains not only a direct dependence,<sup>50</sup> but also a simultaneous dispensation of the *Logos* to Hebrew and Hellenic culture, although they, he suggests, still differ in its reception. Clement claims that Hellenic philosophy preserves a trace (*ichnos*) or a fragment (*sparagmos*) of God's wisdom (*Strom.* I.13.57.6, I.17.87.1–2).<sup>51</sup> Eusebius instead accuses Hellenic philosophers of plagiarizing the wisdom of the so-called barbarians, which include the Hebrews (*P.E.* X.4.28–29), and this, he claims, as Justin did (1 *Apol.* 59.1), also applies to Plato. Eusebius, however, credits Plato specifically with the discovery of the doctrine of intelligible, divine entities, that is, the Forms (*P.E.* XI.8.1).

This evidence shows that early Christians were often of two minds regarding the originality and the value of Hellenic philosophy. Clement, unlike Eusebius, does not hesitate to state that Hebrew law and Hellenic philosophy were equally part of God's providential preparation for Christianity (*Strom.* I.5.28.3–4, I.5.32.4, VI.5.41.5–44.1), which is why he disagrees with the view of Christians like Tatian that philosophy, dialectic, and natural science are useless (I.8.43.1). Clement rather argues that pagan philosophy is useful in training our mind, leading us to wisdom and finally advancing the Christian kind of enquiry and life (I.5.30.1–4).

This is precisely the point that Celsus sets out to dispute, arguing for a strong opposition between Hellenic philosophy and Christianity. He claims that the Christians fail to demonstrate their doctrine, which is chosen only through faith (*pistis*; *C. Cels.* I.9, VI.7, 10, 11), and he reverses the Christian argument of primacy and appropriation of wisdom, arguing that it was rather Christians who had drawn from Platonic philosophy, which they had misunderstood and finally distorted. One example of such a distortion is, in Celsus' view, the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the soul (*C. Cels.* V.14). If the soul, he argues, is an intelligible entity, as Platonists and also most Christians maintained, its redemption should consist in its liberation from the body, not in its returning to it, as the Christians claimed speaking about the resurrection of the body (*C. Cels.* I.8).



In his reply to Celsus, Origen addresses both claims. Regarding the first, which must have been a widespread objection to Christianity at the time (see Chapter 3), Origen presents two arguments. First he argues that faith (*pistis*) is not exclusively a feature of Christianity but also of Hellenic philosophy, since those who become adherents of a philosophical school do not decide on their affiliation after carefully considering the arguments of all schools, but simply trust that one school is superior to all other (*C. Cels.* I.10). This feature becomes evident, Origen continues, when people adhere to unreasonable views, such as the denial of divine providence that Epicurus prominently maintains (I.10). Origen also claims that Celsus is not entitled to accuse Christians of relying on faith when he treats Plato's texts as sacred (VI.1, VI.17). Origen's second argument is that the use of reason, dialectic, and proof is recommended in Scripture and Christians do make use of proofs (VI.7); yet, he says, not everything admits of proof – divine matters do not. Origen claims that human wisdom cannot understand divine wisdom (VI.12–13), a point also conceded by non-Christians, such as Galen.<sup>52</sup> Regarding Celsus' second claim regarding the relation between the Hellenic and Judaeo-Christian cultures, Origen reverses it, arguing for the historical priority of the Hebrew tradition, a point which Eusebius particularly emphasizes, as we have seen.<sup>53</sup> Origen further criticizes Celsus for contradicting himself, since he claims that Christians rely on faith only, while also accusing them of using reason when drawing on Hellenic philosophy.

Origen himself develops the view of Hellenic philosophy that we find in Clement, according to which Hellenic philosophy is a manifestation of *Logos*, whose perfection is Christianity, and this is evidenced, he claims, in the agreement between Christianity and most Hellenic schools of philosophy on topics such as divine providence (*C. Cels.* I.10). Origen maintains, however, that this agreement has its limits, since Hellenic philosophy, even at its best, is often wrong – for instance, in its claims that matter is coeternal with God, a view held by many Platonists (*In Genesis* 14; PG 12, 257–278). Yet, despite his reservations, Origen does not hesitate to model Christian philosophy on the Hellenic philosophical tradition. Discussing the position of the Song of Songs as the third of Solomon's books after Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, he explains that Solomon arranged his books in accordance with the three general disciplines of knowledge, namely ethical, physical, and theoretical, and in this sense, he suggests, Solomon founded true philosophy.<sup>54</sup> The relevant passage merits quotation:

Let us first attempt an investigation of the fact that the church of God has accepted three volumes as writings of Solomon, with the book of Proverbs in the first place, the so-called Ecclesiastes second, while the Song of Songs is assigned to the third. This is what occurs to me at present. There are three general disciplines whereby one arrives at the knowledge of things, which the Greeks call ethical, physical, and theoretical (*ethicam, physicam, epopticen*)<sup>55</sup> whereas we can call them moral, natural, and contemplative (*moralem, naturalem, inspectivam*). Some among the Greeks add as a fourth one the logic, which we can call rational discipline.

(*Commentary on the Song of Songs*, prol. 3.1)

It is interesting that here Origen speaks of the division of disciplines of knowledge, not of philosophy. This is not as innocent as it seems. For the term “philosophy” alludes to Hellenic philosophy and Origen does not want to admit that this is his model here, at least not from the start; he rather speaks as if there were parallel developments between the Hebrew and the Hellenic traditions, the result of the diffusion of *Logos*, as Clement already argued. In his view the diffusion of *Logos* is responsible for the advancement of knowledge, and pagan philosophy is one part of that (*Strom.* VI.18.168.4). Origen’s division of philosophy is, of course, strongly reminiscent of the Stoic division of philosophy, yet it is also different from it and Origen takes a stand on how philosophy should be divided; in what follows he claims that logic is not a distinct branch of philosophy, as many think, such as the Stoics, but is involved and integrated in all branches of philosophy.<sup>56</sup> Origen’s division of philosophy was not a merely theoretical scheme, but actually shaped his teaching curriculum, as we learn from his pupil, Gregory Thaumaturgos. Origen used to teach preparatory subjects including mathematics and logic, then physics and ethics, and finally theology.<sup>57</sup>

Origen’s scheme was anticipated by Clement, who also speaks of the division of Moses’ philosophy and relates parts of the Torah to parts of Hellenic philosophy (*Strom.* I.27.176.1–3).<sup>58</sup> According to Clement’s division, Moses’ philosophy consists of four parts: first, the historical (*historikon*); second, the legislative (*nomothetikon*), both of which correspond to ethics in the Stoic division; third, the priestly (*hierourgikon*), corresponding to physics; and, finally, the theological or contemplative (*epopteia*). Clement claims that Plato includes this last part in the highest mysteries and that Aristotle calls it *meta ta physika* (*Metaphysics*).<sup>59</sup> This conception of philosophy, which goes back to Philo (*De fuga* 36–37) and which we also find later in Eusebius (*P.E.* XI.4–6), rests on the idea advanced by Clement mentioned earlier that there are parallel developments in the Hellenic and Hebrew intellectual traditions, which are explained by the dissemination of *Logos* to both cultures.<sup>60</sup>

We see, then, that the early Christian theory of *Logos* is flexible, appearing in many varieties, while still being sophisticated enough to allow for a subtle link to be established between Hellenic philosophy and Christianity, such that both of them qualify as offshoots of *Logos* and enjoy the status of a rational enquiry aiming at the truth. Given the Christian conception of *Logos*, however, as identical with the Christian God who revealed himself at a certain point in time, Christianity emerges as the completion of that tradition of the unfolding of *Logos*. And, since Christianity is the conclusion of this tradition, it does not need special justification for its use of the tools and doctrines of the tradition, which includes Hellenic philosophy. Clement’s idea of the eclectic character of Christianity and Origen’s projection of the division of Hellenic philosophy to prophetic literature show precisely this. It is also for this reason that Christians such as Tatian and Tertullian were not against this idea of embracing the latter at least partly, despite their polemic against Hellenic philosophy. The question that recurs, however, is whether the Christian conception of philosophy is indeed similar to that of the Hellenic tradition of philosophy, and, if it is similar, in exactly what sense this is the case.

## The Christian conception of philosophy

The evidence we have discussed so far suggests that Clement and Origen have a conception of philosophy close to that of Stoicism, a conception which became canonical in late antiquity and was adopted by several other philosophical schools.<sup>61</sup> This is so in three respects: first, they conceive of philosophy as an attempt to reach secure knowledge; second, this knowledge is both theoretical and practical with no gap between the two; third, they take philosophy as aiming to lead man to happiness, that is, as a way of life.<sup>62</sup> This conception of philosophy is found in the work of other early Christian thinkers, too. Justin defines philosophy as follows: “philosophy is the science of being and knowledge of truth, and the reward of this science and this wisdom is happiness” (*Dial.* 3.5). The science of being and the knowledge of truth must make up a unity here, since the only knowledge that can be true is that of being, which is unchanging (cf. Aristotle, *Met.* V.2). As Justin explains in the passage cited below, philosophy provides the kind of knowledge that is necessary for achieving happiness.

[Justin speaks] Having said this and many other things, which should not be repeated now, he went away bidding me to follow his advice. And I saw him no more. Then a fire was kindled at once in my soul and a passionate desire possessed me for the prophets and those men who are friends of Christ. Considering his word by myself, I found that this alone was philosophy, both safe and profitable. In this way and for those reasons I am a philosopher. And I would like everyone to make up his mind as I did, and not stay away from the saviour’s words. For in themselves they have a certain menace and are sufficient to discourage those turning away from the right road, while the most delightful piece of mind comes to those who practise them. If, therefore, you have some care for yourself and you seek salvation seriously and have trust in God, you may, since you are no stranger to the subject, by knowing the Christ of God and being initiated, live a happy life.

(*Dial.* 8.1–2)

In this passage Justin closely links the knowledge of Christ with happiness, which Christians identify with salvation. Justin claims that it is by knowing Christ that you can live a happy life, and this, he thinks, is the point of philosophy. Clement and Origen are similar in this regard. Clement speaks, as we have seen, of “pious knowledge” (see pp. 36–37), which he links to justice, and he conceives of philosophy as an improvement of our soul which allows us to contemplate the divine (*Strom.* VII.1.3.1), while Origen defines philosophy as “an enterprise that promises the truth and knowledge of beings, and which tells us how we should live and teaches what is beneficial to our race” (*C. Cels.* III.12).<sup>63</sup> Christians conform to a general philosophical tendency in late antiquity when they associate knowledge of first principles and of God in particular with the question of how we should live and how we can attain happiness. Contemporary Platonists used to closely relate

knowledge of the divine with virtue and happiness in view of passages such as *Republic* 497b, where philosophy is said to be divine, of *Timaeus* 47ab and 88bc, where it is suggested that God is the origin of philosophy, and in view of *Theaetetus* 176ab, where it is famously remarked that man's final end is to become like God. Both Platonists and Christians link knowledge of the divine with the understanding of one's true self, which is man's soul, or more precisely man's intellectual soul,<sup>64</sup> which is taken to be immortal, as the *Timaeus* suggests (41cd, 90ac). And both contemporary Platonists and Christians distinguish, as will be seen in Chapter 6, between an inner and an outer man, man's soul and the conjunction of body and soul, respectively.

Plotinus speaks of the knowledge of one's self in several treatises (*Enn.* I.2.1, I.4.16), most famously in *Ennead* IV.8.8. His pupil, Porphyry, further claims that knowledge of ourselves amounts to knowing the true being in us, that is, our intellect, and through this knowledge we can attain happiness (*On Knowing Yourself*, Stobaeus III.21.27; fr. 274 Smith). Like Justin, Clement, and Origen, Plotinus and Porphyry do not distinguish between theoretical and practical knowledge but rather fuse the two on the belief that our true self – our intellectual soul – is derived from the divine intellect, which is the creator of everything that exists. We also find this view in Tertullian (*De an.* 27.3–6), Lactantius (*Div. Inst.* III.12), and Athanasius (*C. Gentes* 2–3). Both pagans and Christians hold that in knowing our true self we also know God, and this helps us live a happy life. And for both pagans and Christians in late antiquity this is the aim of philosophy. It is this conception of philosophy as knowledge and care of one's self by means of virtue that early Christian thinkers share with their pagan contemporaries.

The fact, however, that Christians operate with a conception of philosophy similar to that of Hellenic philosophers does not necessarily mean that they share the same conception, one might argue. Gregory of Nyssa alerts us to this possibility, claiming that Hellenic philosophy agrees with Christianity on several issues, as for example on God's existence, but this, he suggests, does not mean that they share the same conception of God (*Vita Mosis* 337–338). In the same context, Gregory notes that sometimes philosophers reach true conclusions but they do that through questionable syllogistic procedures. Gregory points to the fact that dialectic can be manipulated to support views that are false (as Aristotle shows in the *Tōpics*), and he suggests that the standard against which syllogisms should be held must be Scripture. Gregory, however, admits that Scripture shows us the end that we should seek, but it does not tell us how we should reason in order to succeed; this we need to find out by ourselves.

Gregory argues this in his *On the Soul and Resurrection*, which has the form of a dialogue between Gregory and his sister, Macrina. Having agreed on a definition of the soul according to which the soul is an intelligible substance that actualizes the body and its senses, Gregory objects that the soul is also responsible for the desires we have, including those of the appetitive and the spirited part of the soul. Gregory subsequently asks whether we need to acknowledge many souls in us, and, if not, how the one, intellectual, soul can be ultimately responsible for all our

desires. In her answer, Macrina refers to the division of the soul in Plato's dialogues, such as the *Phaedrus*, and makes the following statement about the so-called "outside philosophy" (*exō philosophia*):

If the outside philosophy, which examines all that closely, was capable of true proof, it would be redundant to consider the question of the soul. Since the investigation into the soul proceeded as it seemed good to them and according to the liberty they enjoyed, we however do not have share in that liberty, of saying, that is, what we want, as we use the Holy Scripture as a rule and law for every view we take, we necessarily look to it and this is what we only accept, namely what agrees with the intention (*skopos*) of the written words. We should leave aside the Platonic chariot and the subjugated pair of horses, who do not have the same desires, and the charioteer, and all this which he [Plato] uses to philosophize with riddles . . . We should make measure of our reasoning the divinely inspired Scripture, which legislates that there is no feature in the human soul that is not proper to the divine nature.

(*On Soul and Resurrection* 49B–52A; p. 33.6–34.7 GNO)

Gregory is, of course, not the only one who claims that Scripture is the measure of truth against which Hellenic philosophy should be judged.<sup>65</sup> Tertullian makes a similar claim, as we have seen (p. 33), while Basil in *Hexaemeron* 1.2 also urges us to follow Scripture instead of the conclusions of human reasoning. Such references can be easily multiplied. The idea that Scripture is the measure of truth is characteristic of Christianity and seems to be a notable difference from Hellenic philosophy to the extent that Christian thinkers appear to have commitments to doctrines prior to enquiry, and they resort to the latter only in order to confirm and illustrate the doctrine of Scripture.

Some caution, however, is needed here in two regards. First, we need to consider the extent to which early Christian thinkers were actually committed to specific doctrines derived directly from Scripture. Of course, Scripture contains a number of statements about the nature of God, man, and the world, and some ethical precepts, but, as I already argued in the Introduction, in it we find neither systematic engagement with philosophical issues nor a philosophical theory or a philosophical argument. Concerning the question of whether humans have the ability to choose freely, for instance, no philosophical theory is presented in Scripture, and, as we shall see in Chapter 4, even the relevant terminology and the corresponding conceptual apparatus are missing. Moreover, the relevant scriptural pronouncements admit of rival interpretations and require specification, elaboration, and explanation. This is highlighted in Origen's treatment of free will; he refers to Scripture mainly in order to differently explicate the passages on which the Valentinian Gnostics rest their own interpretation (see Chapter 4, pp. 151–154). There is a similar ambiguity in Scripture about the nature of the human soul and its relation to the body, which Origen again highlights, as I have noted in the Introduction. Being confronted with different views about

the soul and the lack of a relevant view in Scripture, Origen expresses an *aporia* (*Princ.* proem. 5; see Chapter 5, p. 169), which he takes as a starting point for his investigation, as is the case in many of Plato's dialogues. Irenaeus is similarly aporetic with regard to how God created matter (*Adv. Haer.* II.28.7) due to the lack of scriptural evidence. Furthermore, there is nothing in Scripture on how we perceive sensible objects, on how words relate to things and to our thoughts, on how we form concepts and how they contribute to perception and thinking (see Chapter 3). With regard to all these issues, Christians need to find their way alone, relying on the traditional tools of philosophy.

Second, as I noted in the Introduction, Hellenic philosophers have their authorities too. Plato became an authority for Platonists from very early on, and in the first century BCE Platonists such as Antiochus of Ascalon acknowledge more authorities, the "ancients" (*veteres, archaioi*), a group which included Aristotle and members of the Old Academy. Pythagoreans and Epicureans also attach strongly to their school authorities, Pythagoras and Epicurus. Christians point this out; Origen, for instance, criticized Celsus for his slavish commitment to Plato's texts (*C. Cels.* VI.1, 17), which is not unreasonable if we recall that Clement's contemporary, Atticus, presented Plato's philosophy as perfect and treated any divergence from it as a departure from truth.<sup>66</sup> However, given the ambiguity of Plato's views, which Platonists themselves admitted,<sup>67</sup> there was plenty of room for different interpretations of Plato, and their attachment to his authority did not resolve their differences. Similarly, the attachment that Peripatetics, Stoics, and Epicureans had to their schools involved alignment with the doctrines of their school authorities, but this hardly stopped disagreement. Dissenters, such as the Peripatetic Xenarchus and the Stoic Aristo, who diverged from their respective school authorities on some issues, in a way confirm this state of affairs. A search for the best way to ascertain and strengthen the philosophical system to which they were committed led to their dissension, and it is for this reason that they remained committed to Aristotelianism and Stoicism, respectively.<sup>68</sup>

I would argue that the case of the Christians is not considerably different from that of Hellenic philosophers. Adherents of the Hellenic philosophical schools tried to show exactly how their school authorities should be understood in order to philosophically be the most plausible and credible.<sup>69</sup> This is also the case with Christians. They comply with the largely exegetical character of philosophy in late antiquity. Their statement that Scripture is the measure of truth and the ultimate authority did not ultimately amount to much in actual fact, because Scripture alone did not help them settle any of the crucial philosophical issues they were concerned with, nor did it help them address the objections of non-Christians or alternative interpretations from fellow Christians, such as the various Gnostics. The former would not, of course, be convinced by the mere reference to Scripture, while the latter would continue differently interpreting the same text, pointing to alternative, often ambiguous, relevant scriptural passages. Exegetical debates among Christians gave rise to new philosophical issues, such as Christ's nature and freedom of choice, which needed to be adjudicated by means of argument and philosophical acumen.

It seems, then, that despite what early Christians say about the authority and the value of Scripture, they hardly ever rely on it alone, because they know doing so cannot establish any claim; only argument would do – for instance, an exegetical argument on its own or a deductive argument combined with an exegetical one. In this sense Christians are not essentially different from their contemporary Platonists, despite their rhetorical appeal to an authoritative source of truth, namely Scripture. It is the Christian method of arguing in favour of a particular view that we should ultimately examine in order to finally assess whether they do philosophy or not.

### Christian philosophical reasoning

In their attempts to address a philosophical issue and to argue for a case, Christian philosophers as a rule set out to show how a certain question should be approached, what the content of a certain concept is, and which reasons make a certain view right or wrong. In doing this, they employ recognizable philosophical strategies that are similar to those of ancient Platonists, Peripatetics, Sceptics, Stoics, and Epicureans, namely argument, conceptual analysis, an outline of the existing philosophical positions, and even aporetic method.

Let me first comment on the use of argument. I understand the term “argument” here in the broad sense of “attempted proof”, as used by Aristotle in *Topics* (162a16). Confronted with a philosophical question, early Christian thinkers as a rule first outline the core of the philosophical question (or an aspect thereof) they address and then usually begin by taking issue with a view they consider to be clearly mistaken. This helps them clarify the question they address and the terms involved in it. Their engagement with the view they regard as mistaken helps identify certain positions as contradictory, inconclusive, or otherwise problematic (having unwanted consequences, for instance). Then they go on to demonstrate what the right view is and to explain why this is so. Only at the end of the argument do they refer to Scripture as a confirmation of their conclusions.

This is, for instance, what Justin does with regard to free choice in his *First Apology* (ch. 43). He gives two arguments in favour of the human ability to freely choose, which were stock arguments at the time: first, that the same people do not always act in the same way but their choices often vary and can be even opposed to each other, which, in his view, shows that their decisions are not fated but subject to deliberation and choice; and, second, that the denial of the human capacity for free choice would amount to abolishing virtue and vice and the corresponding praise and blame. It is only then that Justin invokes the authority of passages from the Old Testament and Plato to back up his conclusion (see Chapter 4, pp. 140–143). We find the same strategy in Tertullian’s *Against Hermogenes*. He starts his work by presenting Hermogenes’ position and arguments on cosmogony (I–III), then he advances arguments against Hermogenes’ position (III–XV) to the effect that his position leads to unwanted implications about God. It is again only at the end, after Tertullian summarizes his findings (XVI), that he appeals to Scripture

(XVII–XVIII; see Chapter 2, pp. 70–73). This procedure is even clearer in Athanasius' treatise *On Resurrection*, where he, as already mentioned, distinguishes two discourses, one critical and one constructive. In the former he sets out to argue against the pagan objections to the possibility of bodily resurrection, while in the latter he outlines and defends the Christian view with references to Scripture. Origen follows a similar procedure in *On Principles*. On the issue of cosmogony, for example, Origen first outlines the reasons why God alone created the world, including the necessary matter, and sets out to explain how we should understand that, namely creation in the sense of divine intervention; only at the end does he appeal to Scripture as a confirmation of his view (*Princ.* II.1). If we now turn to a work like Gregory's *On Fate*, we see that his critique of astral determinism is carried out with hardly any mention of Scripture (see Chapter 4, pp. 159–160). Gregory aims to show that the determinism of the astrologists hardly makes any sense, as it leads to absurd consequences, and therefore, he concludes, their position needs to be abandoned; he rather suggests that we need to understand the forces motivating human agents, instead of looking at the movements of the stars. His strategy is similar to that of Plotinus on the same matter.

It seems to me that there are specific reasons for this procedure. The first is the view of early Christian thinkers that Scripture is the fulfilment and perfection of reason rather than an authority that Christians should blindly follow. For, as we have seen in the section on the role of *Logos* earlier on, one crucial point that early Christians make is that reason permeates Scripture and Scripture represents the culmination of reason. Thus, they set out first to show what reason suggests and then refer to Scripture as confirmation. This would become hopelessly circular, however, unless Christians are prepared to demonstrate the rational character of Scripture, since their readers were not exclusively Christians.

There is, however, another reason for this early Christians strategy, which I have already hinted at. They are aware of the fact that Scripture, like all texts, can be interpreted in many different ways, as indeed contemporary Christians had done. It would have been pointless for Tertullian, for instance, to merely invoke the testimony of Scripture in his polemics against Marcion, Hermogenes, or the Valentinians, since they also relied on it. The same can be said of Basil and Gregory of Nyssa in their argument against Eunomius on the status of the divine persons and on the nature of language. Given that the text of Scripture was as open to interpretation, as Plato's texts were, any argument in support of a certain interpretation and against rival ones had to involve exegetical tools in virtue of which one can arrive at the most plausible interpretation of the text.

One such tool was the examination of what the relevant concepts suggest. The concept of God, for instance, suggests a being who is omnipotent, omnipresent, rational, just, good, providential, and so on. A being lacking one of these properties does not qualify as God, some Christians argued. This is the kind of argument we find in Tertullian, for instance, against Marcion and Hermogenes; it is also present in Irenaeus against the Gnostic conception of God. It is true, however, that concepts can be given different content, out of which different conceptions arise.



Epicureans were accused of being atheists by pagans and Christians alike because they did not conceive of God as provident, as Plato did, but they spoke of gods as immortal beings who do not interfere with the world of humans (Cicero, *De nat. deor.* I.43–50). Epicureans were blamed for their conception of pleasure too; for, it was argued, pleasure does not mean “absence of pain”, as the Epicureans understood it, but an instance of drawing satisfaction from something (Cicero, *De fin.* I.38–9, II.13–17). As the evidence shows, there were clearly various assumptions at play behind filling concepts with content, but there were also arguments pointing to certain criteria, such as the ordinary understanding of the concepts.<sup>70</sup> Christians follow this practice, which still characterizes philosophy today.<sup>71</sup>

Another tool employed by early Christian thinkers was the proof *per impossibile*, namely the argument according to which the affirmation of the contrary leads to absurdity or violates rational principles, such as that of non-contradiction. An example of an argument of this kind is provided by Aristotle against the idea advanced in the *Timaeus* that the divine craftsman would preserve the world despite its created character, which makes it naturally subject to corruption. God, Aristotle argues, cannot do what goes against the rational order (*De caelo* I.12); God rather guarantees the persistence of that order (*Met.* XII.9). Arguments of a similar character against those who postulate matter as a principle in cosmogony can be found in Irenaeus and Tertullian. Tertullian argues against Hermogenes, claiming that the latter cannot consider God to be Lord and at the same time maintain that matter is a principle of wickedness, because in such a case God does not rule over matter; if God were Lord of matter before creation, then God could have rendered it good, unless he lacked the power to do so, in which case God is not Lord at all, but this is impossible (*Adv. Herm.* 9.1–2). Christians were also good at discrediting pagan arguments to the effect that Christian views lead to absurdities. Such is the argument against the impossibility of resurrection that we find in Athenagoras (*On Resurrection* 5–6) and in particular in Gregory of Nyssa’s *On the Soul and Resurrection*. Gregory argues that the human body as a material entity is made up of properties whose unity can be dissolved and reconstituted. If this were not the case, Gregory argues, we cannot explain phenomena of generation, corruption, and reconstitution of material entities. If this is the case, however, then the resurrection of the body is perfectly possible (see Chapter 5, pp. 194–195).

Finally, another tool that Christians use is their appeal to the intention or the spirit of a text or an author. This was common practice in the second and third centuries CE. We learn that Ammonius Saccas, the teacher of Plotinus and Origen, developed a special skill in understanding not only what the texts of Plato and Aristotle were explicitly saying, but also what their authors meant – the philosophical view or point behind the texts.<sup>72</sup> This skill was allegedly inherited by his student Plotinus, who sought Plato’s intention (*boulēma*) instead of simply remaining at the level of Plato’s formulations, as, according to Plotinus, Longinus did (Porphyry, *VP.* 14.18–20).<sup>73</sup> Porphyry continued on the same path. Both he and his student Iamblichus insisted on the need to specify the intention of a philosophical work, which practically amounts to its subject matter.<sup>74</sup> Christians operate similarly.

Justin distinguishes between the letter and the spirit of Scripture (*Dial.* 3.3) and it becomes a recurrent point in Origen's *Against Celsus* that Celsus systematically fails to appreciate the spirit of either Scripture or Plato and proceeds no further than the letter of the text. As a result, Origen claims, Celsus' charges against Christianity do not apply because they are the products of his misunderstanding. The following passage is characteristic of Origen's critique:

If the readers of this page [Plato *Symposium* 203b–e] take Celsus' malice as their model, which is something that the Christians are not pleased to do, they can laugh at Plato's myth and ridicule Plato himself. If, however, they examine in a philosophical manner what is said in the form of a myth and can discover the intention (*boulēma*) of Plato, they will admire the manner in which he [sc. Plato] hides the most important doctrines from the many, using the form of myth, but to the knowledgeable ones he makes clear how through myths they should reconstruct the intention (*boulēma*) of the author who wrote them regarding the truth.

(*C. Cels.* IV.39.47–51)

Origen disputes Celsus' ability to understand what Plato's text suggests and his exegetical skill, more generally. Origen further suggests that Celsus was motivated by a spirit of contentiousness, which motivates him to treat ancient texts uncharitably, misinterpreting them. For Origen this accusation applies particularly to Celsus' interpretation of Scripture. The following passage sums up Origen's claim:

Celsus has hardly understood the intention (*boulēma*) of our Scriptures. For this reason he refutes his understanding of them, not that of Scripture. If he had understood what is the fate of the soul in the eternal future life and what one should believe about the soul's essence and origin, he would not have been deriding the entering of an immortal being to the mortal body, not in the sense of Plato's theory of transmigration but according to a more sublime theory.

(*C. Cels.* IV.17.10–17)

Here Origen reminds the reader that the understanding of Scripture, as of Plato, requires philosophical and exegetical acumen that manifests in understanding what the relevant concepts suggest and in how they are used, and this is a skill not available to everyone.<sup>75</sup> A prerequisite for the development of this skill is an awareness of the level of discourse present in the texts in question. Origen insists that both Scripture and Plato speak ambiguously, in riddles, and, in order to decipher them, interpretation is required.<sup>76</sup> Origen was seriously concerned with the question of how one can penetrate the meaning of Scripture and was motivated by a high degree of sensitivity to what best makes sense to read into Scripture.

It should be noted at this point that Origen's commentaries on Scripture display many similarities with contemporary commentaries on philosophical and

poetic texts. In his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, for instance, Origen follows the schema of introductory remarks found in pagan philosophical commentaries, and this is also the case with his *Commentary on John*.<sup>77</sup> Origen follows and further develops the textual methods used by his contemporaries in analysing and expounding a text. One such method involves the allegorical reading of Scripture, motivated by the assumption made by many of his contemporaries that the texts do not always say what they appear to say, but rather that the sense of the text is something apart from the obvious. And, as I already mentioned in the Introduction, in the allegorical interpretation the real subject of the text is not the obvious or ostensible one. Origen applies this exegetical method particularly to poetic texts such as the Song of Songs. He claims that the content of this book is expressed in the form of mystical utterances.<sup>78</sup> This requires that the reader and the exegete possess a high level of skill, which amounts to the ability to decipher the hidden meaning of the text.

This kind of interpretation was long used by pagans and Jews alike.<sup>79</sup> Early Stoics find in mythology hidden truths, and they undertake to spell out their philosophical message; Plutarch on the other hand explains the myth of Isis and Osiris as containing cosmological tenets, which he set out to align with his interpretation of Plato's cosmogony in the *Timaeus*.<sup>80</sup> Philo was the first in the Judaeo-Christian tradition to interpret Scripture allegorically, and he was a model for Christian interpreters like Origen. In the same spirit, Porphyry champions the allegorical interpretation with regard to the texts of ancient poets, such as Homer. His work *On the Cave of the Nymphs* illustrates his allegorical strategy well.<sup>81</sup>

Origen was not the first Christian who applied a hermeneutical method to Scripture. Clement had already spoken of a certain hermeneutical rule by means of which Scripture should be interpreted, namely the assumption of concord between the Old and New Testaments, which essentially means reading the former in light of the latter (*Strom.* VI.15.125.3; see further Chapter 3, p. 107). This is similar to the interpretative practice of contemporary Platonists with regard to Plato's work: they set out to interpret Plato's work as a whole and sought in his work that which could most convincingly be attributed to Plato.<sup>82</sup>

This exegetical strategy of early Christians brings with it the following consequence: the truth of Scripture ceases to be a quality that is inherent in it or pertains to it and rather becomes a quality that the interpreter should establish. It is this skill that is tested every time an interpreter asserts that Scripture or Plato presents us with truth on a given issue, for this is a quality of a certain position that needs to be articulated, explained, and argued for. If this is so, then the Christians use not only strategies recognizable as those commonly used by ancient philosophers, but they also employ exegetical methods that render their use of and appeal to Scripture not much different from the exegetical practice of contemporary Platonists. Christians' appeal to Scripture is an appeal to what makes most sense to read in Scripture, but this is a human construction, a human interpretation requiring skill, ability, and ingenuity – not the authoritatively delivered word of God, a revelation of truth,

despite the Christian statements to the opposite. Had Christian thinkers not realized this, they would not have invested so much energy and zeal in argument and exegesis.

## Notes

- 1 I discuss this point of view in some detail below.
- 2 For a discussion of Justin's attitude to philosophy, see pp. 34–35.
- 3 On “the true philosophy”, see Clement, *Strom.* II.11.48.1, II.131.2; Gregory of Nyssa, *De institutione Christiano* 48.13. On “highest philosophy”, see Eusebius, *D.E.* I.6.56; Basil, *Letter 8* (Loeb, vol. I, p. 48 Deferrari); Gregory, *Vita Mosis* 305B. On “the philosophy of Christ”, see Clement, *Strom.* VI.8.67.1; Eusebius, *P.E.* XIV.22.7. On “philosophy according to the divine tradition,” see Clement, *Strom.* I.9.52.2.
- 4 See Dörrie (1976b), who describes Christianity as “Gegenplatonismus”, as opposed to Kobusch (2002), who speaks of Christian philosophy as the perfection and completion of ancient philosophy. (“Christliche Philosophie: das Christentum als Vollendung der antiken Philosophie”).
- 5 See Sophocles (1887), *s.v. philosophia*.
- 6 Cf. Eusebius, *D.E.* I.6.74, who claims that God wanted that everyone philosophize, not only men but also women, not only the rich but also the poor.
- 7 Tatian says that he wrote a work on living beings or animals (*Or.* 15.2–4, 25.1–8), and one on daemons, in which he argued that daemons are not the souls of humans (*Or.* 16.1–6). On Justin, see below.
- 8 The only occurrence of the word *philosophia* in the New Testament is by Paul in his Letter to the Colossians 2:8 to refer to heretical opinions.
- 9 Tertullian's attitude to philosophy is discussed by Labhardt (1950); Barnes (1985: 120–121); Fredouille (1972: 337–357); Osborn (1997: 27–43).
- 10 See n. 8, the reference to Paul. Later examples include Gregory, *C. Eun.* II.404–406 (GNO 344.13–25), who accuses Eunomius of drawing on Plato.
- 11 Thus Chadwick (1966: 1ff.) and also Barnes (1971: 210), with more qualification.
- 12 Tertullian actually argues in this work that the traditional robe, the mantel (*pallio*), must rejoice at the rise of a better philosophy (*melior philosophia*), i.e. Christianity.
- 13 For a sketch of Lactantius' attitude to philosophy, see Gigon (1979).
- 14 “Although I believe that not everything was said well by the man [Plato], yet most has been said by him in accordance with the truth” (*P.E.* XI proem 5.); cf. *P.E.* XI.8.21. Also, Lactantius calls Plato “the wisest of philosophers” (*Div. Inst.* I.5.23).
- 15 Cicero, *Acad.* II.115; Aenesidemus in Photius, *Bibliotheca* cod. 212, 170a24–33.
- 16 See Polito (2007).
- 17 See, e.g., ps-Justin, *Exhortation to Greeks* 5.1, who points out in regard to Plato and Aristotle: “if we find them also in disagreement, we can easily then infer their ignorance”.
- 18 This is argued explicitly by ps-Justin, *Exhortation to Greeks* 5.1, 38.2.
- 19 Indicative is the following statement: εἰ δὲ ἡ τοῦ ἀληθοῦς εὐρησις ὄρος τις λέγεται παρ' αὐτοῖς φιλοσοφίας, πῶς οἱ τῆς ἀληθοῦς μὴ τυχόντες γνώσεως τοῦ τῆς φιλοσοφίας ὀνόματός εἰσιν ἄξιοι' (If they admit that the discovery of truth is a condition for doing philosophy, how are the ones who fail in that worthy of the name of philosophy?; Ps-Justin, *Exhortation* 36.1). Lactantius argues this point throughout book 4 of *Div. Inst.*
- 20 See Plato, *Phd.* 95e–105c, *Rep.* VI 485a–491b; *Tim.* 47bc; Aristotle, *Met.* 993b19–31; IV.1–3.
- 21 See Karamanolis and Politis (2017: introduction).
- 22 I read “εἰσιν”, which is the reading of manuscripts that Minnis and Parvis (2009) prefer, as opposed to “ἦσαν”, Ashton's conjecture, preferred by Marcovich in his edition (1994). First, there are no palaeographical reasons for the change of the manuscript reading; second, the contrast that Justin makes is between the view that contemporaries of Socrates and Plato had of them and their allegedly Christian identity, which is not a time-dependent quality.

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- 23 On Justin's treatment of Socrates, see Young (1999: 91); Frede (1999b: 142–143), (2006).
- 24 On Justin's doctrine of *Logos*, see Andersen (1952–1953); Holte (1958); Edwards (1995: 262–280).
- 25 “[R]ejoicing at Plato's doctrines” (τοῖς Πλάτωνος χαίρων διδάγμασι; 2 *Apol.* 12.1).
- 26 See Goodenough (1923: 58) and, for more, Zachhuber (2021: 7).
- 27 Galen, *Diagnosis and Cure of the Passions of the Soul*, vol. V.41–42 Kühn; Porphyry, *VP.* 3.6–17.
- 28 See Seneca, *Epist.* 90; Posidonius fr. 284 Edelstein-Kidd; Cornutus, *Greek Theology* 20, 39.12–40.4 (now trans. by Boys-Stones, 2018); Chaeremon tried to reconstruct ancient Egyptian philosophy and Cornutus did the same with Greek theology. See Frede (1994: esp. 5193–5194 and Boys-Stones (2001: 45–54).
- 29 Numenius fr. 1a (=Eusebius, *PE.* IX.7.1), 1b Des Places (=Origen, *C. Cels.* I.15); Celsus in Origen, *C. Cels.* I.14, III.16, where Celsus portrays this true account as an ancient one (*archaios Logos, palaios Logos*), making reference to Plato's *Laws* 715e–716a.
- 30 On one God being responsible for the order and stability of the world, see Celsus in Origen, *C. Cels.* I.24, V.41; Frede (1997b: 218–240). The author of *De mundo* also goes on the same assumption, which he considers almost universal in classical antiquity; see Gregoric and Karamanolis (2020: introduction, pp. 8–9). On God being incorporeal, see Numenius fr. 1b Des Places (=Origen, *C. Cels.* I.15).
- 31 *On the Dissension of the Academics from Plato*, frs. 24–28 Des Places (=Eusebius, *PE.* XIV.4–9). See Boys-Stones (2001: ch. 6).
- 32 Porphyry's *History of Philosophy*, of which only fragments survive (frs. 199–224 Smith), stops his exposition with Plato, presumably because he takes the same view about Plato's role in the history of philosophy.
- 33 Καταφαίνεται τοίνυν προπαιδεία ἢ Ἑλληνικὴ σὺν καὶ αὐτῇ φιλοσοφίᾳ θεόθεν ἦκειν εἰς ἄνθρωπος (It appears then that Greek preparatory education together with its proper philosophy has been sent to mankind by God; *Strom.* I.6.37.1). Cf. Numenius frs. 24, 65.5–7 Des Places. On this, see Boys-Stones (2001: 140, 192–194).
- 34 *Strom.* VI.5.41.5–44.1, VI.11.92.2; cf. *Strom.* I.6.37.1, cited above. Lactantius also includes, among the ancient beneficiaries of *Logos*, some poets, such as Virgil (*Div. Inst.* VII.24).
- 35 Στοιχειωτικὴ τίς ἐστὶν ἢ μερικὴ αὕτη φιλοσοφία, τῆς τελείας ὄντως ἐπιστήμης ἐπέκεινα κόσμου περὶ τὰ νοητὰ καὶ ἔτι τούτων τὰ πνευματικότερα ἀναστρεφομένης (This partial philosophy is a certain rudimentary guide to the truly perfect science of the world beyond that concerns the intelligibles and furthermore deals with the most elevated of them; *Strom.* VI.8.68.1, 83.2, 123.3).
- 36 Φιλοσοφίαν δὲ οὐ τὴν Στωϊκὴν λέγω οὐδὲ τὴν Πλατωνικὴν ἢ τὴν Ἐπικούρειον τε καὶ Ἀριστοτελικὴν, ἀλλ' ὅσα εἴρηται παρ' ἐκάστη τῶν αἰρέσεων τούτων καλῶς, δικαιοσύνην μετὰ εὐσεβοῦς ἐπιστήμης ἐκδιδάσκοντα, τοῦτο σύμπαν τὸ ἐκλεκτικὸν φιλοσοφίαν φημί (*Strom.* I.7.37.6).
- 37 See, e.g., Origen, *C. Cels.* I.10; Lactantius, *De ira Dei* 4.1–13; *De opif. Dei* 2.10.
- 38 Εἶη δ' ἂν φιλοσοφία τὰ παρ' ἐκάστη τῶν αἰρέσεων τῶν κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν λέγω ἀδιάβλητα δόγματα μετὰ τοῦ ὁμολογουμένου βίου εἰς μία ἀθροισθέντα ἐκλογὴν (I claim that philosophy would be the undisputed doctrines of each philosophical school chosen together with a life in accordance with reason; *Strom.* VI.6.55.3).
- 39 The sources are Aetius I proem. 2 (*SVF* II.35; LS 26A) and Seneca, *Epist.* 89.4–5 (LS 26G).
- 40 *Res.* I.4–5; cf. Plato *Sophist* 230cd; Albinos, *Epitome* VI.3; Gregory of Nyssa, *De an.* 20AB; Lactantius, *De falsa religione* I.53.
- 41 *Strom.* I.9.44.1 with reference to *Gorgias* 464a–466a. We encounter a similar conception of philosophy in the Platonist Antiochus (Cicero, *Acad.* II.32; *De fin.* V.38–60) and in the Peripatetic Aristocles (frs. 5–6 Heiland/frs. 7, 4 Chiesara).
- 42 For a commentary on this part of Clement's work, see Macris (2019). Clement discerns a similar predilection for monotheism also in Hellenic literature.

- 43 One such attested case is that of Potamo, about whom we learn mainly from Diogenes Laertius I.21.
- 44 Cf. *Strom.* I.6.33.5–6. Clement's eclecticism is discussed by I. Hadot (1990).
- 45 For a discussion of Galen's attitude to philosophy, see Frede (1999b: 786). See also Frede (2003).
- 46 Galen, *On Diagnosis and Cure of the Passions of the Soul* vol. V 42–43 Kühn; *PHP V* 778–779 Kühn, *On My Own Books* IX 12–14 Kühn.
- 47 Books XIV and XV of Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica* set out to make precisely this case.
- 48 On this topic, see Ridings (1995); Boys-Stones (2001: 176–202).
- 49 Justin, 1 *Apol.* 59.1; Tatian, *Or.* 40; Theophilus, *Ad Autol.* III; Tertullian, *Apol.* 47.9; ps-Justin, *Exhortation to Greeks*, 9.1, 20.1.
- 50 *Strom.* V.13.89–VI.5.38, esp. V.13.89.1, V.14.140.1–3, VI.2.15.1, VI.2.27.1–5, VI.6.55.4. See Wyrwa (1983: 298–316).
- 51 Justin comes close to Clement's view when he claims (2 *Apol.* 10.18) that Socrates was familiar with the *Logos*.
- 52 On Galen's attitude to God, see Frede (2003).
- 53 Origen claims that Plato borrowed from the prophets and not vice versa, while, in the case of the Apostles, it is implausible, Origen argues, that these poorly educated men talked about God the way they did, having misunderstood the Letters of Plato, as Celsus argued (*C. Cels.* VI.7).
- 54 See Fürst (2011); Edwards (2003: 245–246). On Origen's commentary on the Song of Songs, see Edwards (2018: esp. 80–84). The work survives in Rufinus' Latin translation.
- 55 There is a problem with the text here, esp. with the term *epopticen*; see Edwards (2018: 82). On this division of philosophy, see I. Hadot (1987) and P. Hadot (1987), who point to parallels, e.g. Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 7.4.
- 56 In his *Homilies in Genesis*, however (IV.3.39), Origen accepts logic as a third part of philosophy. I surmise that in this passage Origen adopts a widely held view, whereas in the passage from the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* he gives us his more reflected view on the matter. See further Chapter 3, pp. 114–116.
- 57 *Oratio Panegyrica in Origenem* 7.156; Origen, *Epistle to Gregorius* 1.10–18; Cf. Clement, *Strom.* I.5.30.1–2. See further Chapter 3 (with regard to the status of logic) and Chapter 5.
- 58 Ἡ μὲν οὖν κατὰ Μωυσῆα φιλοσοφία τετραχῆ τέμνεται, εἰς τε τὸ ἱστορικὸν καὶ τὸ κυρίως λεγόμενον νομοθετικόν, ἄπερ ἂν εἴη τῆς ἠθικῆς πραγματείας ἴδια, τὸ τρίτον δὲ εἰς τὸ ἱερουργικόν, ὃ ἐστὶν ἤδη τῆς φυσικῆς θεωρίας. καὶ τέταρτον ἐπὶ πᾶσι τὸ θεολογικὸν εἶδος, ἢ ἐποπτεία, ἣν φησὶν ὁ Πλάτων τῶν μεγάλων ὄντως εἶναι μυστηρίων, Ἀριστοτέλης δὲ τὸ εἶδος τοῦτο μετὰ τὰ φυσικὰ καλεῖ (*Strom.* I.27.176.1–3). See Wyrwa (1983: 124).
- 59 The term *epoptikon* occurs in Plato (*Symp.* 210a), not in Aristotle. Yet Plutarch also ascribes to both Plato and Aristotle the idea that contemplation (*to epoptikon*) is the end of philosophy (*De Iside* 382D–E). See further P. Hadot (1987: 17).
- 60 Clement adopts the division of philosophy into ethics, physics, and theology in his own work (cf. *Strom.* IV.1.3.2). See Havrda (2019: 132–133).
- 61 Platonists since Antiochus (Cicero, *Acad.* I.19, *De fin.* V.9–11), as well as Peripatetics (e.g. Aristocles fr. 1 Chiesara), adopt the Stoic division of philosophy.
- 62 On ancient philosophy being a way of life, see P. Hadot (1995).
- 63 Πάλιν τε αὐτὸ ἐπεὶ φιλοσοφία ἀλήθειαν ἐπαγγελλομένη καὶ γινώσκει τῶν ὄντων πῶς δεῖ βιοῦν ὑποτίθεται καὶ πειράται διδάσκειν τὰ ὠφέλιμα ἡμῶν τῷ γένει. . . (*C. Cels.* III.12).
- 64 See Clement, *Strom.* I.20.98.2–3, II.19.100.3, also Basil, *Letter* II. 14, *Hom.* in “attende” 35.12 and the discussion in Kobusch (2002: 249–251), to which I owe the references. The key passage here is *Protagoras* 313ab, where the soul is presented as identical with one's self (ἐαυτός).
- 65 See also *Vita Mosis* 360, where Gregory draws an analogy between Hellenic philosophy and the wealth of the Egyptians, which the Hebrews can appropriate. However, earlier in the same work he claims that Hellenic philosophy is barren, like Moses' stepmother, and should be resisted as the Jews resisted the Egyptians.

## 54 The Christian conception of philosophy

- 66 See Atticus fr. 1 Des Places, which comes from a work against those who set out to teach Plato's doctrines through those of Plato. See Karamanolis (2006: 150–157, 174–175).
- 67 Plutarch and Plotinus argue that Plato speaks in riddles and with many voices. See Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 370E–F, *De def. orac.* 421F, Plotinus, *Enn.* IV.4.22.6–12, IV.8.1.23–33.
- 68 There is also evidence of differing views among Epicureans, despite their strong attachment to the authority of Epicurus' teaching (*De fin.* I.69–71).
- 69 See P. Hadot (1987).
- 70 This is what Cicero does; he points to the common understanding of pleasure in *De finibus* (II.13–16) against the deviant Epicurean understanding of it.
- 71 See Dummett (2010: 11).
- 72 The evidence comes from Photius, *Bibliotheca* cod. 214, 171b38–172a8, cod. 251, 461a24–39 and is discussed in Karamanolis (2006: 191–207).
- 73 Longinus in Proclus, *In Tim.* I.83.19–24 (Longinus fr. 32 Patillon-Brisson), Plotinus, *Enn.* IV.8.1.23–8. See, on this, Brisson et al. (1982: 266–267).
- 74 See, for instance, the remark of Proclus, *In Tim.* I.204.20–27, concerning the opening part of the *Timaeus*.
- 75 Cf. Basil, *Hex.* 6.1, who notes that the reader eager to understand the great issues should have a trained mind.
- 76 The first part of *De Principiis* IV deals specifically with the interpretation of Scripture; see esp. *Princ.* IV.1–3, where Origen outlines his exegetical principles. Consider also the following passage from Origen: “I seek the most intelligent and penetrating people since they are able to follow the elucidation of the riddles and of the statements that are cryptically made in the Law and the Prophets and the Gospels, which you despised as containing nothing of value, without examining the sense embedded in them and without trying to enter into the sense of the written words” (*C. Cels.* III.74).
- 77 On this matter, see I. Hadot (1987); P. Hadot (1987); Neuschäfer (1987); Heine (1995); Fürst and Strutwolf (2016: 6–19).
- 78 *Totumque eius [sc. scripturae] corpus mysticis formatur eloquiis.* (*Comm. on Song of Songs* prol. 1.3). On Origen's interpretation of the Song of Songs, see further Edwards (2018).
- 79 On the allegorical interpretation, see Dawson (1992) and also Boys-Stones (2001: 31–37, 50–51, 91–95).
- 80 Cf. Plutarch, *De aud. poet.* 19e–f, where he points out that the term *allēgoria* has been replaced with the term *hyponoia*.
- 81 Now see Nilüfer (2019: esp. ch. 1).
- 82 On this interpretative practice of ancient Platonists, see Karamanolis (2006: 10–28). Similarly Gregory of Nyssa argues that his theory of soul is hinted at (ὑποσημαίνειν) in Scripture (*De an.* 81A, GNO 50.9), which means that it is not in Scripture but makes sense to read it in it.

# 2

## PHYSICS AND METAPHYSICS

### First principles and the question of cosmogony

#### Introduction: the philosophical agenda

In this chapter I set out to discuss two issues that early Christians saw as tightly connected, namely the question of the first principles of reality and the question of cosmogony. Roughly speaking, the first issue deals with the ultimate causes of all things in the world, while the second concerns how the world, the *kosmos*, came into being.

Both questions were crucial to early Christian philosophers. This becomes apparent from the fact that they spent a great deal of energy in addressing them. The task, however, turned out to be especially demanding and became a source of continuous debate among early Christian philosophers. There was indeed considerable disagreement among them about how to handle these questions, let alone how to settle them. Even when early Christians agreed on some central points, such as the idea that God created the world from nothing, further questions arose, such as how an immaterial God could bring the material world into existence. This situation resulted partly from the complexity of the issues involved and partly from the fact that Christian philosophers insisted on treating them jointly. They did so, however, because they appear to believe, as we will see, that the enquiry into the principles of reality and how the world came into being are so closely connected that they are two aspects of a single issue, namely how God relates to the world. I would like to investigate how they came to think in this way. First, however, a comment about the question of principles is in order.

The investigation of principles does not constitute a philosophical field as such. Ancient philosophers speak of principles of knowledge in general and of specific fields of knowledge, of principles of movement, and of principles of being. The Greek term for principle, *archē*, means both “beginning” and “foundation”; it is usually translated as “principle” because it signifies both something that initiates a certain outcome, and something that accounts for it. In the latter sense, *archē* amounts to a cause initiating change, which, in Aristotle’s words, would be



“that which is the cause of change on something” (*Met.* 1012b34–35). In natural beings, the principle both of being and of change is, according to Aristotle, nature (*Phys.* 192b20–23). For different classes of beings there are distinct natures, which are principles of change and rest for each being (*Met.* 1049b5–10). The soul, for instance, is said to be the principle and cause of living beings (*aitia kai archē*, *De an.* 415b8), that is, a principle of change and rest. A principle, however, can also account for a certain state. Aristotle speaks of the principle of all being, substance (*Met.* 1041a9),<sup>1</sup> and of the principle of all substances (1003b17–19, 1069a18–19), the unmoved mover, his candidate for God (1071b3–1073a13). In the *Republic* Plato spoke of the source of all being, the Form of the Good (509b7–8),<sup>2</sup> while in the *Laws* the principle of all being (*archē tōn ontōn*) is God (*Laws* 715e8). Common to all these efforts is a concern with establishing causes accounting for certain kinds of beings, such as natural beings, living beings, all being, or for what counts as being. I call this ontological concern.

In the *Timaeus*, now, Plato is motivated by a specific ontological concern. He is concerned with investigating how the world, the *kosmos*, has come about, and he speaks of a special kind of principle that accounts for its generation (*Tim.* 28b6). This principle, we are told, is the divine craftsman, or the demiurge, an intellect that crafts the *kosmos* by modelling it on the intelligible, living Being, that is, the totality of intelligible Forms (28a1–b2, 29a4–b1, 69c1–3). The world, however, is not the offspring of the divine intellect and the Forms alone, but also of necessity (*anankē*),<sup>3</sup> because the divine intellect, since he is a craftsman, needs to craft his materials before anything else. His materials are the four elements of Empedocles – earth, air, fire, and water – which the demiurge crafts using a formless medium (51ab), a “mould” (50c2), the so-called receptacle (*hypodochē*; 49a6).<sup>4</sup> Having crafted his materials to be “as perfect and excellent as possible” (53b5–6), the demiurge proceeds to create the world as a living being (30b8), a being with body and soul (31b4, 34b10). Plato speaks of the four elements as the principles of all (*archas tōn hapantōn*; 48b7–8). By this Plato does not mean the principles of all things; he confesses to being hesitant in “undertaking a task of such magnitude” (48c7–d1). He rather speaks of principles of generation and names the demiurge as the main principle (*genēseōs kyriōtatēn archēn*; 29e4), the Forms as instrumental to the demiurge (28a7), and declares necessity an auxiliary cause (*synaitia*; 46c7, 46e6), that is, a secondary principle. The question, though, is what these are principles of. Are they principles of being or of a specific being, the world, the *kosmos*? Are they ontological or cosmological principles, or both?

But what does it actually mean to speak of cosmological principles? The ancient term *kosmos* admits of a variety of wide and narrow uses, of which Christians were aware.<sup>5</sup> *Kosmos* can be taken to mean the earth,<sup>6</sup> heaven,<sup>7</sup> the sensible universe as a whole, that is, heaven and earth,<sup>8</sup> or the totality of beings, including gods, intellects, and souls.<sup>9</sup> In the *Timaeus* Plato speaks of the generation of *kosmos* in the sense of the universe, which includes sensible beings in earth and heaven as well as souls, including the world soul, which accounts for the world’s life and orderly motion. The principles, then, of which the *Timaeus* speaks are principles of both

sensible and intelligible beings. This idea guides Origen in his *On Principles*; he thus speaks of principles of the sensible world and also of souls, angels, and spirits. For Origen, God is the creator of both the intelligible and the sensible realms.<sup>10</sup> This is why in *On Principles* he proceeds hierarchically from the intelligible principles (God) to their effects (first intelligible entities, then sensible entities).

However wide the application of the term *kosmos* may be, though, its meaning is clear; it means order, a good arrangement. The *kosmos* is the successful outcome of an ordering activity, as expressed by the verb *kosmein*,<sup>11</sup> an activity that reveals wisdom and goodness.<sup>12</sup> As the *Timaeus* makes clear, these are the two most essential properties of the demiurge (goodness: 29a3, 29e1, 37a1, wisdom: 29ab). God's goodness is manifested not only in the creation of the world (30ab) but also in his concern for preventing its destruction (41ab). Since the demiurge is characterized by goodness, some Platonists identified him with the Form of the Good in the *Republic*.<sup>13</sup> Other Platonists, however, resisted this idea and identified the Form of the Good with a God higher than the demiurge on the grounds that the latter is constrained by necessity, but they still considered him a principle of being and affirmed both his goodness and the goodness of his product, the world.<sup>14</sup>

These moves are characteristic of a general tendency in Platonism to conflate principles of being with principles of generation – as I mentioned earlier, the demiurge is a principle of the generation of the world, while the Form of the Good is a principle of being. This tendency is attested from very early on in Platonism. Speusippus and Xenocrates, Plato's successors in the Academy, understood the principles of the *Timaeus* as principles of everything that there is. They distinguished between a principle of unity and intelligibility, the monad, which corresponds to the demiurge, and a principle of plurality and division, which amounts to the receptacle.<sup>15</sup> Later Platonists such as Antiochus speak of an active and a passive principle, God and matter, respectively,<sup>16</sup> which is reminiscent of the Stoic view, according to which God and matter are the principles of everything.<sup>17</sup> This view is also found in the work of early Christians such as Hermogenes, against whom Tertullian wrote a treatise. The crucial point for us here is that Platonists and Stoics identified ontological and cosmological principles, and Christians followed this trend.

The Platonist version of principles was particularly appealing to Christians, as it had already been to Philo of Alexandria, who drew heavily on the *Timaeus* in his interpretation of Genesis.<sup>18</sup> There were several reasons for this appeal. First, the idea of Plato's demiurge attracted Christians because of his obvious similarity to the creator God of Genesis. For, while the majority of ancient philosophers agreed that the universe is marked by order, intelligibility, and goodness, only Plato suggested that God creates the world by imposing these features on it from without. Aristotle and the Stoics did consider God to be the principle of the world's order, goodness, and intelligibility, but denied that God is a principle of generation. Second, the Christians were attracted by the teleology of the *Timaeus*, that is, the idea that the world is created as an expression of God's goodness and wisdom and is meant to be good and beautiful.

This view, however, was resisted in late antiquity. The Gnostics as well as Marcion and his followers advocated, in one way or another, the view that the world as a whole or in large part is essentially bad. Marcion, for instance, maintained that “God . . . is the creator of wicked things, takes delight in wars, is inconsistent also in temper and at variance within himself” (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I.25.1).<sup>19</sup> For the Gnostic Valentinus and his followers, on the other hand, the sublunary region, which is created by the creator, is bad, while the higher, non-created regions, are perfect.<sup>20</sup> Marcion and the Gnostics distinguished sharply between God, the creator of this world, the God of Genesis and the Old Testament, whom they considered ignorant, wicked, irascible, and envious, and a higher God, the Christian God of the New Testament, whom they considered wise and essentially good (Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* I.6).

Platonists, such as Plotinus, and Christians both argued fiercely against the view that the world is bad, the product of an ignorant and wicked creator. Four treatises in the *Enneads*, the result of Porphyry’s editorial division of Plotinus’ writings, constitute a single work critical of the Gnostic position (*Enn.* III.8, V.8, V.5, II.9). In this lengthy work, Plotinus sets out to show that the world is essentially good and beautiful, and this quality is due to the goodness and beauty of the intelligible principles accounting for it, namely the world soul and the divine intellect. Christian philosophers were also deeply concerned with this Gnostic position. A considerable amount of Christian philosophizing is channelled into the composition of polemical works against the Gnostic view of the world and the corresponding relation of God to the world.

Both the advocates of the essential goodness of the world and of its essential wickedness, however, agree that the world involves both features: order (that is, harmonious change) and virtue, as well as disorder (disastrous change, such as natural catastrophes) and vice. Furthermore, the two groups also agree that the world must have a character similar to that of its creator. Those who maintain that the world is predominantly good, harmonious, well-ordered, and so forth, postulate a creator with a similar nature, who thus accounts for these qualities; their opponents, who held that the world is essentially full of wickedness, paint the creator accordingly. Their common feature is the belief that inferences can be drawn from the nature of the world about the nature of its principle on the grounds that the latter accounts for the world’s essential characteristics.

We find this tendency in the author of the pseudo-Aristotelian *De mundo*,<sup>21</sup> who sets out to “theologize (*theologeîn*) about all the greatest features of the *kosmos*” (391b4), by which he means to show that the universe is orderly, harmonious, and wisely arranged by God, who qualifies as the sustaining cause of the universe (397b9) and its preserver (*sōtēr*; 397b22).<sup>22</sup> God, however, we are told, is responsible for the orderly arrangement of the universe through a power (*dynamis*) originating from him (396b28–30), that is, God is constantly present in the world, albeit distant from it. The lesson that the treatise seeks to impart is that God is responsible for the kind of being the world is and we need to have a proper conception of God and his relation to the world in order to gain full appreciation of the world. This tendency

grows stronger in the case of the Christians, Gnostics and non-Gnostics alike. Both insist that the world is a reflection of God<sup>23</sup> because they are concerned with making God responsible for the features of the world that they in turn attribute to God, yet they disagree on what these features are – wickedness and ignorance or goodness and wisdom.<sup>24</sup> Tertullian, for instance, claims that God created the world so that he can be known (*Adv. Marc.* II.6), further suggesting that creation is the only evidence from which we know God (*Paen.* 5.4). It is creation, he argues, that manifests the divine attributes, such as goodness, rationality, and justice (*Adv. Marc.* II.5, 7, 12).

It was the concern to establish such a relation between God and the world's constitution that motivated many Christian philosophers to focus on cosmogony. For Irenaeus, for instance, as well as for the Peripatetic author of *De mundo*, the study of the world pertains to theology (*Adv. Haer.* II.56), that is, we can only understand the world if we gain understanding of its cause. Irenaeus suggests that denying creation amounts to erring about God (I.12.1); creation, he claims, teaches us what kind of being God is, namely wise, loving, and providential (III.24.1–2, 25.1). This reasoning must have been inspired by *Timaeus* 29e, which can be understood as suggesting that the world's beauty implies that a good craftsman was its cause.<sup>25</sup> However the case may be, though, early Christian philosophers systematically used the evidence provided by the nature of the world as the content for their conception of God. And, since they considered God the ultimate source of all cosmic attributes, they considered themselves justified in counting cosmic attributes as divine attributes. From the foregoing, it is hoped that we now understand why the Christians jointly examined first principles and cosmogony.

### How many principles account for the created world?

The Christian strategy outlined above has its limits. For, no matter how God's involvement with the world is explained, the question of why wickedness occurs in the world remains. The non-Gnostic Christians, much like Plato (e.g. *Rep.* 379c, *Theaet.* 176a), wanted to deny that God, the principle of the world, is responsible for it. Wickedness arguably features in the world, though, and as such it needs to be accounted for. Leaving it unexplained is not an option because doing so would mean either that God left things to chance or that he was not powerful enough to entirely impose goodness unto the world.

One possible strategy of dealing with this issue would be to opt for a form of dualism, namely the positing of two principles: God, who is responsible for goodness, and some other principle responsible for wickedness in the world. An alternative strategy would be to defend a form of monism, which basically amounts to positing God as the only or the highest principle in a hierarchy. Either approach, however, is beset with serious difficulties. It was ultimately impossible to escape the undesirable implications that God is either not completely powerful or not completely good. This was a difficulty ancient Platonists also faced, and, to the extent

that Plato's work was a source of inspiration for the Christians, they inherited this problem as well. Let us examine this issue more closely.

Given the material nature of the universe, one idea was that matter is a principle; and if one assumes that God, who is entirely good, is not responsible for the wickedness of the world, then matter emerges as a potential candidate for its cause. This view was already taken by Aristotle, who identifies the receptacle in the *Timaeus* with matter and speaks of it as "evil-doing" (*kakopoion*; *Phys.* I.9, 192a15).<sup>26</sup> Speusippus disagreed (*Met.* 1091b30–35; fr. 64 Isnardi), but later Platonists revived this idea; it was adopted in the first century CE by Moderatus (Simplicius, *In Phys.* 230.5–27), and in the second century by Celsus (*C. Cels.* IV.65), and especially by Numenius (fr. 52.37–39, 44–64 Des Places).<sup>27</sup> Even those Platonists, however, who did not consider matter wicked or responsible for wickedness did maintain that it was a principle of the universe, given that in the *Timaeus* it is a contributing cause (*synaition*) in cosmogony (46c7, 46e6) and does not owe its existence to the demiurge (53b2–4). For these Platonists, matter was accordingly regarded as a principle of the world along with the demiurge and the Forms.<sup>28</sup> Plotinus rejected this view; he identified matter with wickedness but refrained from considering it a principle or even firmly associating it with a principle,<sup>29</sup> as Plutarch or Numenius had done.<sup>30</sup> But in either case God is responsible for matter and hence also for wickedness, or he is not; and, as I have said, both options are problematic. Proclus pointed this out in his critique of Plotinus. Proclus argued instead that God is not responsible for wickedness and that the latter is non-being, a privation and a side effect of goodness, just as a shadow is a privation and a side effect of light.<sup>31</sup>

The Christians sought to avoid the problems faced by Platonists. With regard to the origin of wickedness, their efforts were focused on discussing the principles of the world separately from the origin of wickedness; they would come to associate the latter with human vice (see further Chapter 4). With regard to the question of principles contributing to cosmogony, the Christians wanted to clearly state that they understood God as the efficient cause of the world and creation as generation. They thus replaced the (primarily Platonic) distinction between two ontological realms, that of intelligible and that of sensible beings, by a distinction between ungenerated and generated beings, employing the term *ktisis* and its cognates for the latter,<sup>32</sup> instead of the cognates of *gignesthai* (*gegonen*, *genētos*) used in the Platonist tradition. The latter terms are ambiguous regarding the kind of causation involved, whether efficient, formal, or final,<sup>33</sup> which is why Platonists long debated about the sense in which God creates in the *Timaeus*, whether in a literal sense of creation as generation, or in a non-literal sense of God's being the formal and final principle of an always-existing world. By speaking of *ktisis*, though, it is made clear that God is an efficient cause and that creation amounts to generation. If God is responsible for creation, then the world is ontologically different from God. This was likewise not so clear in Hellenic philosophy. In the *Timaeus* the world is said to also be a god, and this view was also held by Aristotle, the Stoics, and Plotinus.<sup>34</sup>

But if God is the efficient cause of the world, then there is a question of the status of matter, of whether it is a cosmic principle. For Christians it was controversial

whether matter is indeed such a principle, that is, whether it contributes to cosmogony. By implication it was also controversial whether matter exists eternally, as God does, or not. If it does, then God and matter are both causes of the generated realm and both have the same ontological status; but if God and matter share a common ontological status, then God is not a unique being. And if matter is ungenerated, as God is, and contributes to creation, then God is not omnipotent either; his power and responsibility for the nature of the universe is diminished. If the creation of the world is an act of God's goodness, his goodness is conditional on the existence of matter. If, on the other hand, God is the only principle of the generated universe, this maximizes God's power and responsibility for the kind of being that the universe is, but God is then responsible for all the features of the world, including wickedness – a responsibility which Christians wished to deny. Furthermore, in this scenario there is the issue of how an intelligible being, such as God, can create matter, given the ontological disparity between the two, an issue that the Platonist exegetes of the *Timaeus* did not have to address. This kind of thinking made Christians averse to distinguishing ontological from cosmological concerns and prone to conflating them.

The account of cosmogony that we find in Genesis, on which Christians relied, is ambiguous on the role of matter. It can be, and indeed has been, interpreted in two ways: (a) God created the world by imposing order onto a primeval chaos (cf. Wisdom of Solomon 11.18); or (b) God created the world from nothing (*ex nihilo*). Early Christians were initially split between the two alternatives. Puzzlement also characterizes the oldest surviving work of a thinker in the Jewish tradition, Philo, who addresses this issue in treatises such as *On the Creation of the World*, *On the Eternity of the World*, and *On Providence*. In the first of these, Philo introduces two principles, an active and a passive one, namely God and matter, respectively (*De opif.* 8). This is reminiscent of Stoicism but, unlike the Stoics, Philo only calls the former a cause (21), which suggests that he was a monist. In his view matter is disordered and qualityless (*ataktos, apoios*; 22) and creation apparently consists in the divine act of ordering it (22–30). In *On Providence*, Philo argues that God makes use of the right amount of matter in order to create (*De Prov.* fr. 1; Eusebius *P.E.* VII.21), a view that Origen later takes, but it is unclear whether Philo considers matter eternal or created.<sup>35</sup> This ambiguity also characterizes the first Christian thinkers.

## Early Christian views on cosmogony and first principles

### *Justin Martyr and Athenagoras: God, Logos, and matter*

The first Christian thinker who takes a stance on these matters is Justin Martyr. Justin sets out to present what he takes to be the Christian received doctrine (*pareilēphamen, edidagmetha*; 1 *Apol.* 10.1),<sup>36</sup> but his account bears the mark of his own philosophical ideas and training. Justin maintains that God created everything out of his goodness from unformed matter (*ex amorphou hylēs*; 1 *Apol.* 10.2). He further claims that God created the world by transforming darkness and matter (*to*

*skotos kai tēn hylēn trepsas kosmon epoiēsen*; 67.7). Such statements suggest that Justin takes matter to be eternal and originally devoid of quality, like the receptacle in the *Timaeus*, in which case creation amounts to the divine act of imparting form onto matter. This is clearly conveyed by Justin's use of the verb *trepsas*, meaning "to alter, change".<sup>37</sup> Justin explicitly states that the view according to which everything has been ordered and created (*kekosmēsthai kai gegenēsthai*) by God is Plato's doctrine (1 *Apol.* 20.4), and he rejects the relevant Stoic position, according to which no creation took place.<sup>38</sup> Later on in the same work, Justin claims that Plato borrowed his account of cosmogony from Moses (1 *Apol.* 59.1) and repeats that the universe was made by God's word out of underlying materials (*ek tōn hypokeimenōn*), a view he parallels with that of the Greek poets' creation from chaos (59.6).

However, in his *Dialogue with Trypho* Justin argues that only God is uncreated (*agennēton*) and everything that comes after him is created and perishable (*Dial.* 5.4–6). This passage has been taken to suggest that for Justin matter is also created, a claim which would be at odds with the statements in the *Apologies* just mentioned.<sup>39</sup> This, however, is not the case. In this passage of the *Dialogue* Justin does not address the issue of cosmogony as such, nor does he address the question of the status of matter; the passage is rather part of the investigation into the question of whether the soul is mortal or immortal, and Justin's appeal to the *Timaeus* at this point is meant to show that the soul is immortal in the same sense that the world is imperishable according to Plato, namely because of God's will. The contrast that Justin draws at this point is between God, who is "ungenerated and incorruptible", and all other generated things, including the soul. Justin repeats his view about God's status often in his writings (1 *Apol.* 14.1, 25.2, 49.5; 2 *Apol.* 6.1, 12.4, 13.4). He defines God as "what is always the same and in the same manner, and is the cause of existence to everything else" (*Dial.* 3.4). The idea Justin defends is that God is essentially different from everything he is the cause of, including the soul of man.

If, however, one asserts God's ontological superiority so strongly, two problems result. Why and how did God bring the world into existence and why and how does he maintain it, given its ontological difference from God? And, second, how can man know God at all, if God is substantially different from all generated things? Later Christian philosophers address these questions explicitly, while Justin does not. He does seem, however, to be aware of them and appears to hint at a certain way of dealing with them.

This hint can be found in an important distinction that Justin makes between God and his *Logos*, whom Justin identifies with the Son of God, Christ. Following the Gospel of John (1.3), Justin repeatedly points out that God operates in the world through his *Logos* (*di' autou*; 2 *Apol.* 6.3; cf. 1 *Apol.* 64.5; *Dial.* 62.1, 84.2, 114.3); he describes *Logos* as the power (*dynamis*) of God.<sup>40</sup> On such a view God is distanced from the actual work of creation but still qualifies as the ultimate cause of creation.

We find similar positions in Platonism and Aristotelianism. The function of Justin's *Logos* has been paralleled with that of the world soul in the *Timaeus* (1 *Apol.* 55.6–8, 60.1–5),<sup>41</sup> since it also has a mediating role between the creator and

the creation. The world soul in the *Timaeus* is brought about by the demiurge by partaking in the reason of the latter, and so is God's *Logos* in Justin (*Dial.* 128.4). The difference, however, is that, unlike the world soul, God's *Logos* has not been brought about. There are also similarities between Justin's *Logos* and the God of the pseudo-Aristotelian *De mundo*, who is said to have set the world in order through a "power that penetrates all things".<sup>42</sup> Justin, however, describes *Logos* not only as a power of God but also as "another God" (*heteros theos*; *Dial.* 62.2, 128.4, 129.1, 4), who differs from God in number but not in opinion (*gnōmē*; *Dial.* 56.11). Such a view is then closer to the doctrine of the first and second God of Numenius (frs. 11–16 Des Places) and Alcinous (*Didasc.* 164.27–165.34). Apparently Justin wants, on the one hand, to distance the highest God, the Father, from the material realm, an idea that also motivates the distinction between the first and second God in Platonists such as Numenius;<sup>43</sup> but, on the other hand, he wants to steer clear of the Gnostic position, according to which a God superior to the creator is postulated (1 *Apol.* 26.5, 58.1).<sup>44</sup>

Although Justin's *Logos* may well operate like Numenius' second God, that is, as a divine entity through which the highest God creates and rules the world, we do not find in his work – unlike in Numenius (fr. 52 Des Places) – any hint regarding the presence of wickedness in the universe and its association with matter. Justin rather argues that the universe was created for the sake of man and as an expression of God's goodness (1 *Apol.* 10.2; 2 *Apol.* 4.2, 5.2; *Dial.* 41.1), a point likewise stressed by later Christian philosophers. There were Christians in Justin's era, however, who did associate pre-existent matter with wickedness. One such case is Hermogenes, against whom Tertullian wrote a polemical treatise, noting that Hermogenes drew on Plato. There most likely also were other Christians who shared this conviction (Tertullian, *Res.* 11.6; *Adv. Marc.* II.5.3); this would explain Tertullian's fervour, since a polemic is usually undertaken against widespread views. It is then not implausible that Justin, who was also indebted to Plato, postulated pre-existent matter. Quite the opposite: given his formulations mentioned earlier, he is likely to have postulated pre-existent, disordered matter, which God arranged wisely.

A younger contemporary of Justin, Athenagoras of Athens, also speaks of two principles, God and matter, and his major concern is how to distinguish them (*Legatio* 7.1, 10.1). Athenagoras employs the image of the craftsman and his materials in order to illustrate the gap between the two (15.2). He does not distinguish between unformed and formed matter (7.2, 16), presumably because this does not bear on how God differs from matter. His imagery, however, suggests that he might well believe in eternal matter. This would make sense, since Athenagoras addresses Marcus Aurelius,<sup>45</sup> who, as a committed Stoic, accepted God and matter as eternal principles. Athenagoras, like Justin, speaks of the Son of God as an entity through which God accomplishes creation, and he specifies that the Son is the *Logos* of the Father in Form and Activity.<sup>46</sup> I shall come to the issue of the relation between God the Father and God the Son in the final section of this chapter (pp. 88–96). Let us now consider some difficulties that pertain to the idea of pre-existent matter.



### ***Problems with pre-existing matter and the notion of creation***

The Christian view that matter existed before creation, which amounts to the imposition of order on matter, faces the same problems that the literal interpretation of the *Timaeus* does. These difficulties are of two kinds.

The first arises directly from the fact that two coeternal principles are postulated: formal and material. For, as suggested earlier, if God, the creator, and matter are coeternal, this undermines the unique character of God's causal role in creation and it is no longer so clear why God should be venerated as the highest being. Besides, if God creates out of pre-existing matter, this means that God alone is not a sufficient principle for creation, and this in turn means that God's power is severely restricted, since creation is contingent on matter. This would further suggest that God's freedom is also limited, since the universe would be created according to exigencies imposed by matter and not by the will of God alone. If this is the case, then God's goodness is constrained as well, a view that approaches the Gnostic position.

The second kind of problem arises from the implications carried by the act of creation resulting from the interaction of God and matter. The way matter is present in material entities points to a certain kind of efficiency. The way matter exists in material entities suggests that it has a propensity to be shaped by reason, which would remain unexplained without acknowledging a source of reason, such as God, as the main principle of creation. If matter is a principle of creation coeternal with the source of reason, namely God, then how can we explain the fact that matter was already of such a nature that it could be structured so that material entities come about? And, furthermore, what of the existence of only as much matter as was necessary for creation?

In addition to these problems, early Christian philosophers were confronted with difficulties pertaining to creation in the sense of generation. If the universe comes about as the result of God's activity, regardless of whether this activity lies in imposing order into matter or creation without pre-existent matter, the implication is that there was a point when the world did not exist. We are then faced with the question of why God did not create the universe earlier, if its creation is an expression of his goodness. Why did God not bring about something which is good sooner? Either there had always been a good reason for the creation of the world, or this reason occurred at some point. If the former is the case, this would imply lack of wisdom and providence on God's part, which is untenable. If a good reason for creation occurred at some point, its adoption by God would imply that God is subject to change, which is also untenable.<sup>47</sup> There are actually two difficulties involved here. The first is how a changeless God can indeed change from a state of not desiring the existence of the world to desiring it; the second is how a changeless God could have created the world without undergoing some change himself.

The question of why the universe did not come into being sooner goes back, in a way, to Parmenides (fr. 8.9–10 DK), but it was fully articulated by Aristotle as

an objection against the view suggested in the *Timaeus* that the world came into being after a period of non-existence (*De caelo* 283a11–23). Platonists apparently found Aristotle's objection disconcerting and came up with an interpretation that the cosmogony of the *Timaeus* should not be taken literally because its primary aim is pedagogical – to highlight the demiurge as the main principle of the universe.<sup>48</sup> The literal interpretation was revived with Plutarch when the *Timaeus* once again became the central text for Platonists. Atticus adhered to this interpretation,<sup>49</sup> but it was resisted by most contemporary Platonists, such as Taurus, Severus, Plotinus, and Porphyry. Christians, however, insisted, as I have said, on conceiving cosmogony in the literal sense of generation, because they wanted to accentuate the role of God as efficient cause and also sharpen the distinction between God and the world. This was Philo's line of reasoning, which Justin followed, conscious of his divergence from the Platonists in this respect (*Dial.* 5.1). The agreement of Christians on the general direction of interpretation, however, leaves a great deal of unsettled issues. A particularly thorny one was how generation should be conceived and, more precisely, exactly how God shaped matter.

### ***Tatian and Theophilus: God creates out of nothing***

Tatian and Theophilus unequivocally argue for the view that God created the universe out of nothing and not from pre-existing matter, as Justin maintained. They, like Justin, do not enter into the debate concerning possible objections, nor do they consider the problems arising from their position.

Tatian resembles Justin in being concerned with defending Christianity as a whole. The relation of God to creation is such a crucial issue to him that it turns up very early in his sole extant work, the *Oratio ad Graecos*. Tatian suggests that there are three causes involved in the creation of the universe: God, *Logos*, and matter (ch. 5), a view comparable with the Platonist account of three principles (God, Forms, and matter) that we find, for instance, in Alcinous' *Didaskalikos*.<sup>50</sup> Tatian goes on to maintain, however, that God has always existed and is the only entity without a beginning (*anarchos*; chs 4–5), while matter came into being, and is for that reason not a principle, because only that which is without beginning qualifies as a principle (*archē*). I quote the relevant passage:

For matter is not without beginning (*anarchos*) like God, nor because of having a beginning is it also of equal power with God; it was originated and brought into being by none other, but is projected by the sole creator of all that is.

(*Oratio* ch. 5, ll. 24–27; trans. Whittaker)

Interestingly, Tatian does not say that God created matter; he rather says that matter is projected or emitted by the creator (*hypo tou dēmiourgou probeblēmēnē*). Tatian does not explain what he means by this phrase. One possibility is that Tatian distinguishes two stages in creation: in one, the divine creator created

matter; in the other, matter is projected by the creator so that all beings come about.<sup>51</sup> This is possible in view of his reference to disordered matter (*akosmēton*), while earlier he refers to matter as being in a state of confusion (*synchysis*). If this is the case, it remains unclear whether Tatian refers here to the first stage of creation, namely the creation of disordered matter, or to the second stage, the projection of Forms onto matter so that bodies come about. The verb *proballomai* can function in either manner; it can also signify bringing something into being out of nothing, in which case there would be no stages in creation.<sup>52</sup> Notice that in the same context Tatian uses the verb *propēdan* (ch. 5, l. 7), meaning “proceed forth”,<sup>53</sup> to indicate the coming into being of *Logos*. And for Tatian the *Logos* is not identified with God’s power, as is in the case of Justin, but rather comes about from it.

If we look, however, at the context of the passage cited above, it becomes fairly clear that Tatian distinguishes between the creation of disordered matter, which is indicated by the verb *proballomai*, and the ordering of matter, indicated by the verb *kosmēsai*, which is used also in the *Timaeus* (e.g. 53a7, 69c1). This is hardly accidental. Tatian’s view, according to which God created out of nothing, that is, out of nothing outside God himself, but in two stages (corresponding to the creation of matter and of bodies), is still inspired by the *Timaeus* (see, e.g. *Tim.*, 31b, 34c, 69b–c). Christian thinkers of Tatian’s generation will try to break away from the *Timaeus* and develop a properly Christian theory of cosmogony because they want to escape the problems resulting from either the literal or the figurative interpretation of the *Timaeus*. In the former, the problem for the Christians was that matter pre-exists creation, while in the latter the desired act of creation does not take place. As a result, Christians become increasingly critical of the cosmogony of the *Timaeus* despite its similarities with that found in Genesis.

Theophilus is one of them. He argues that the view according to which God created out of pre-existent matter diminishes God’s power by assimilating him to the human craftsman (*Ad Autol.* II.4). This is a clear allusion to the *Timaeus*, which is identified as a source of some people’s mistaken interpretation of the account of Genesis. Theophilus maintains instead that God is the only principle (*archē*; II.10). He claims that “God created all things” (*ta panta epoiēsen ex ouk ontōn*; II.10, II.13), “whatever he wished and in whatever way he wished” (II.10). The phrase *ex ouk ontōn ta panta epoiēsen* is, however, ambiguous, as it can mean either that God created all things out of no beings, or that he created all things while no beings were existent. In order to find out exactly what Theophilus’ meant, a closer look at his work is needed.

Theophilus speaks in a way that implies that, apart from God, there are two other causes, matter and God’s *Logos*, both of which, however, are dependent on God; matter was created by (*hypo*) God, who created the universe from (*apo*) matter (*Ad Autol.* II.10) and through (*dia*) his *Logos* (II.10, II.13), which is God’s wisdom and instrument in the creation of the world. This means that for Theophilus God did not create out of no beings, since matter and *Logos* existed, although God accounts for them. Apparently, then, according to Theophilus

God created out of nothing. Theophilus' language does not necessarily imply two stages in creation, as is probably the case with Tatian, or as the *Timaeus* appears to suggest; Theophilus actually warns us against a process-like conception of creation, as found in a certain interpretation of the *Timaeus* (II.13). His approach, however, is still strikingly Platonist, since, like Platonists, he marks different causal relations through the use of prepositions;<sup>54</sup> he distinguishes the efficient cause, the creator God, from the material cause and the instrumental cause, the *Logos*, in a way that only God qualifies as a principle in a strict sense, while the other two are only auxiliary principles, but not in the same sense as the Forms and necessity are in the *Timaeus*, since unlike them (at least unlike necessity) matter and the *Logos* are dependent on God. This means that, for Theophilus, God is both necessary and sufficient for bringing the world into being, and this is because it is God who determines the purpose of creation, which is humanity. Theophilus, like Justin, claims that God creates for the sake of humanity, so that "he might be known" by man, which is part of the plan to lead humanity to salvation (II.10).

### ***Creation ex nihilo defended and developed: Irenaeus and Tertullian***

With Irenaeus of Lyon and Tertullian the question of cosmogony and God's relation to the world becomes the central issue in Christian thought. Their preoccupation with it is strongly motivated by their polemics against the alternative accounts of the Gnostics and Marcion, which were apparently popular at the time and not totally lacking in philosophical acumen or persuasive power.

Irenaeus' main work, *Against Heresies (Adversus Haereses)*, is a systematic refutation of the accounts of Gnostics (such as Valentinus, Basilides) and of Marcion. In their polemics against the Gnostic theories of creation, Irenaeus and Tertullian specifically target the Gnostic view of God. In this view, of which there were several variants, the creator God is not the highest God but rather a subordinate craftsman who follows the orders of a higher God, executing them, however, with limited skill and showing little concern for his creations. This view rests on a certain reading of Scripture and is additionally motivated by several philosophical reasons. As I mentioned in the Introduction, the Gnostics distinguish between the God of the Old Testament and that of the New Testament, considering the former to be just but irascible and malevolent, and the latter to be good and beneficent. They identify God the creator with the former, and the highest or true God with the latter.<sup>55</sup> Philosophically speaking, their view is partly motivated by the wish to maintain the transcendence of the highest God, a concern present in contemporary Platonists such as Moderatus and Numenius, and their wish is supported by the idea, advanced specifically by Marcion, that we cannot possibly come to know the true God, given the ontological gap between human beings and God. It is for this reason that the true or highest God reveals himself only through Christ (*Adv. Marc.* I.17.1, I.19.1). To discredit the Gnostic and Marcionite view, one has to disarm

their philosophical underpinnings. This is what Irenaeus attempts to do. Let us see how he states his case.

It is appropriate, then, to begin with the primary and most fundamental point for us, the creator God, who created the heavens and earth and everything there is in them. Some blasphemous people call this God the product of deficiency. We want to demonstrate that there is nothing either above him or below him that did all this, nor was this set in motion by someone else, but it was by his own decision and freely that he created everything, being the only God, the one who contains everything in him and brings everything about.

(*Adv. Haer.* II.1.1)

Irenaeus makes clear that he sets out to argue against the view that there is a divine being above the creator and that the latter is a mere craftsman who takes orders from above, and is in this sense a product of deficiency.<sup>56</sup> A variation of this view, which Irenaeus also attacks, is that of Marcion, according to which there are two Gods (*Adv. Haer.* II.1.4), one who is good and one who judges (111.25.3), which implies that the latter is not as good as the former. The crucial feature in the view of the Gnostics and Marcion is that the hierarchically second God, the creator, acts out of necessity and displays limited or no goodness and wisdom, which is why they refuse to identify the creator with God the father, or, as Irenaeus says, they make the creator a false father (IV.7.3). Irenaeus aims to restore the status of the creator God.

The thrust of Irenaeus' argument lies in demonstrating the goodness of the divine creator. He appears to believe that goodness is an essential feature of God that characterizes God's creative activity as well. This is expressed in his statement "there is no God unless he is good, because there is no God without goodness" (III.25.3).<sup>57</sup> This is reminiscent of the point Plotinus makes against the Gnostics that God without virtue is only a name (*Enn.* II.9.15 32–40; see further Chapter 6, p. 206).<sup>58</sup> Plotinus supports his view by pointing to the beauty of this world, arguing that its beauty reveals the character of its source (*Enn.* II.9.16–17, III.8.11, IV.8.6.23–28), a point made already in the *Timaeus*.<sup>59</sup> Irenaeus also considers God as revealing himself in the world through creation (*Adv. Haer.* IV.20.7), insisting that "creating is proper to the goodness of God" (IV.39.2),<sup>60</sup> and he appeals to the *Timaeus* to support the idea that there is only one creator God who creates out of goodness (III.25.5).<sup>61</sup> But how does his argument of goodness actually work?

Irenaeus appears to have a specific conception of goodness. Essential to this are two components, beneficence and rationality. The first component becomes clear in his statement that "creating is proper to the goodness of God", which suggests that the goodness of God is not merely a disposition or a potentiality but rather exists by being actualized in beneficial acts. The point is apparently directed against the proponents of Marcion's view, who argued that God is indeed good but did not himself create the world, yet he still wants to save mankind – and thus do good.

The second component of goodness, rationality, is implicit in Irenaeus' argument that God created the world for a reason that has to do with the salvation of man (see below). The connection between goodness and rationality becomes explicit in Tertullian, who states: "I require reason in his [God's] goodness, because nothing can be properly accounted good than that which is not rationally good: far less can goodness itself be found in any irrationality" (*Adv. Marc.* I.23.1). On such a view, reason is a necessary condition for goodness to exist. This view essentially recasts the Socratic idea that goodness cannot be achieved without reason (*Euthydemus* 280a–281e), which is taken up by the Stoics, who go on to claim that if God is rational, he must be also good.<sup>62</sup>

For Irenaeus and Tertullian, then, God is good to the extent that he always operates with reason; and the evidence of creation, they argue, illustrates that this is precisely the case. Irenaeus claims that God created for the benefit and indeed for the sake of man and there is a rational plan to lead man to salvation (*Adv. Haer.* V.18.1, V.28.4, V.29.1).<sup>63</sup> Creation was actually part of God's salvation plan.<sup>64</sup> If God did not create, man would not exist and would not have known God. It is Irenaeus' conception of goodness as actualized for the benefit of the world and man that we observe here. Like Justin and Theophilus, Irenaeus holds that God creates in order to become known and to guide man towards him (*Adv. Haer.* III.5.3, III.24.2).<sup>65</sup> This does not mean, however, that God created out of necessity, as the Gnostics assumed. God, Irenaeus claims, can never be the slave of necessity (V.4.2); rather, God follows his own nature, that is, goodness. Neither can one assume that there is another God higher than the creator God (IV.7.3), Irenaeus argues, because the features of such a God are unimaginable if the creator God is absolutely good, omnipotent, and free.

Irenaeus' position is not without its problems. To begin with, one could argue that creation is not sufficient for humans to know God. Irenaeus anticipated such an objection and he points out that knowing God does not amount to knowing God's substance and greatness, but rather his love, kindness, and providence (III.24.2, IV.20.4–6).<sup>66</sup> Irenaeus' argument, however, comes close to being circular: God's goodness becomes manifest in its guiding man to know him, and this guidance in turn shows to man that God is good. There are also further problems. One is how God creates the world while remaining transcendent. Like Justin, Irenaeus does postulate some mediation between God and creation; he maintains that God creates through his *Logos* (I.11.1, II.2.4), God's Word and Wisdom.<sup>67</sup> He actually distinguishes between God the Father, Word the Son, and Wisdom the Spirit (III.24.2, III.25.7, IV.7.3). All have a role in creation, which is linguistically specified by the use of prepositions, as in Theophilus: things are created by God (*ex quo*) through the Son of God (*per quem*; IV.33.7).<sup>68</sup> Irenaeus argues, however, that God the Father is the only cause of creation (IV.20.4), since Word and Wisdom depend on God (see "First principles and divine persons: the Christian concept of God" below, pp. 88–96). Irenaeus actually makes a strong case claiming that God created the universe out of his own substance: "And he took from himself the substance

of things that were created and the model of the things made and the form of things ordered" (IV.20.1).<sup>69</sup>

This statement, taken together with the previous one that God contains everything in himself (*Adv. Haer.* II.1.1, cited above, p. 68), which Irenaeus often repeats (II.35.3, III.8.3, III.20.2, IV.20.6, IV.36.6), suggests a view reminiscent of that of contemporary Platonists, according to which God, an intellect, hosts the Forms in him. Numenius and Plotinus take this view on the basis of the claim in the *Timaeus* (52d3) that being (*on*) is united, that is, the divine intellect and the Forms are one (Numenius fr. 12 Des Places; Plotinus, *Enn.* V.5.3). Irenaeus seems to imply such a view when he speaks against the existence of an independent paradigm, invoking the analogy of the craftsman who invents things; it would be ridiculous, he claims, to deny this ability to God (II.7.5).<sup>70</sup> But Irenaeus seems to be saying more than this when claiming that God contains everything in him; the implication seems to be that God also created matter out of himself. Irenaeus actually states this, although he expresses ignorance of how this happened (II.28.7).

At this point Irenaeus breaks with the craftsman analogy of the *Timaeus*, as Theophilus also did. Irenaeus actually criticizes Plato along with the Gnostics for postulating a principle of creation outside God (II.14.2–4), namely matter, insisting that God created out of nothing and that the creation of matter is not a distinct stage in creation.<sup>71</sup> Irenaeus' claim that God creates through his *Logos* means to confirm that God realizes his will without resorting to anything outside himself. The view that God contains everything created within him but operates through the mediation of the *Logos* approaches the claim of Platonists, such as Plutarch, that the world-soul, which is responsible for the coming into being of the world, takes part of the demiurge insofar it acquires his reason (*Plat. Q.* 1001C). In this sense the demiurge is the father, not only creator, of the world (*Plat. Q.* 1000E–1001B; cf. *Tim.* 28c). Both Irenaeus and Plutarch intend to establish the affinity between God the creator and the world through a mediating entity that informs the world. In the case of Irenaeus, this is God's will.

Irenaeus comes to define God as uncreated, eternal, self-sufficient, pure thought and substance, absolutely good, and the source of goodness (*Adv. Haer.* III.8.3, IV.11.2). This definition is similar to Xenophanes' definition of God (B24 DK)<sup>72</sup> and also comes close to Plato's and Aristotle's conceptions of God. This is not an accident. Irenaeus wants to draw a sharp distinction between a rational definition of God, which he finds in Hellenic philosophy, and what he considers to be the mythical definition of the Gnostics (see *Adv. Haer.* I.12.1, II.13.3). This is interesting primarily because it shows that Irenaeus sees Christianity as a continuation of the rational enterprise of Hellenic philosophy. He makes this clear when he pairs the Gnostics with the Epicureans (IV.4.4) while he presents himself as being in agreement with Plato. It is also interesting because it shows that Irenaeus, despite his distance from the conception of God found in the *Timaeus*, nonetheless finds Plato's conception of God far better than that of the Gnostics.

Tertullian's position was also shaped by his polemics against those who disputed that God is the only principle of creation. His two main opponents were Marcion

and Hermogenes, who represented two versions of dualism. Both Marcion and Hermogenes maintained that God creates out of pre-existing matter, which is wicked (*Adv. Marc.* I.15.4, IV.9.7; Clement, *Strom.* III.2.12.1). This means that they postulated God and matter as necessary principles for the world to come into being, while Marcion, as has been said, also postulated two Gods: a higher one who is good, and an inferior creator. Tertullian's arguments against Marcion are along the same lines as those of Irenaeus,<sup>73</sup> while his attack against Hermogenes is unique because of the information he provides about his adversary's view and also for the way he argues his case.

Who was Hermogenes? He must have been a Christian living at the end of the second century whose views seem to be remarkably close to those of contemporary Platonists.<sup>74</sup> Tertullian, however, accuses Hermogenes of embracing the Stoic doctrines and abandoning the Christian ones. Let us first look at the main view that Tertullian ascribes to Hermogenes:

He seems to acknowledge a Lord not different from ours, but makes him a different being by acknowledging him in a different way. Above all, he removes all that constitutes his divinity, as he refuses to accept that he created out of nothing (*ex nihilo universa fecisse*). For he turned away from the Christians and towards the philosophers, he turned away from the church and towards the Academy and Stoicism, as he took over from the Stoics<sup>75</sup> the idea of placing matter also at the level of the Lord, since for him matter has always existed too, being neither born nor created, nor having any beginning, and it is from matter that the Lord created all things.

(*Adv. Herm.* 1.3–4)

In the successive paragraphs Tertullian presents Hermogenes' main thesis. This takes the form of the following problem:

- (a) either God made the world out of himself; or
- (b) out of nothing; or
- (c) out of something else, namely matter.

If one opts for (a), then, Hermogenes suggests, one admits that the world is part of God. This is impossible, however, first because God has no parts and is unchangeable. Second, if a part of God comes into being, this means that God did not always exist and that God is imperfect, since everything created, such as the world, is imperfect (*Adv. Herm.* 2.2–3), and this is impossible. Option (b) is also impossible, because God is essentially good and the creator of only good things, but the world is not completely good; rather, there are all kinds of evils in it, and this could not have happened by God's own decision. There must then be, Hermogenes claims, something else involved in the creation of the world that accounts for all evils in it, and this should be matter (2.4). Thus only option (c) is left.



Even if we accept the problem that Hermogenes poses, his argument at best shows that God created the world out of matter, not that matter always existed. For this reason, Hermogenes adds another element to his argument. He argues that God has always been Lord, and he could not have been Lord unless there was something over which he was Lord, namely matter (*Adv. Herm.* 3.1). Hermogenes rests his argument on a widely presumed divine property: God's ability to rule. He claims that this property requires there to be something God should rule over. Since the world is created, the only thing that God could rule over is matter. Thus matter should be eternal.<sup>76</sup> Hermogenes thus advocates a dualistic thesis, postulating God and matter as principles of the world.

Tertullian dismantles the dilemma that Hermogenes poses by undermining its premises, beginning with Hermogenes' last argument regarding the eternal existence of matter. He argues that Hermogenes is guilty of a category mistake here, confusing substance with accident when talking about God's being Lord. The term "God", Tertullian argues, denotes substance, while the term "Lord" denotes an accident, namely God's ruling power.<sup>77</sup> Divine accidents can come into being and perish, while divine substance cannot: God becomes judge of man, for instance, only when sin comes into being, and similarly God becomes Lord only when creation comes into being (*Adv. Herm.* 3.3). Besides, Tertullian remarks, if matter is pre-existent, as Hermogenes claims, then it has an independent existence, in which case it does not make sense to call God "Lord" because he is not superior to it (3.7).

Tertullian proceeds to examine the substance of Hermogenes' dualistic thesis and claims that it leads to impossible conclusions. He argues that Hermogenes equates matter with God by attributing eternity and independent existence to it, in which case it is difficult to see on which grounds matter should be considered subordinate to God, as Hermogenes claims (*Adv. Herm.* 7.3). Worse, Tertullian suggests, in Hermogenes' view it is God who needs matter, while matter does not need God, and, as a result, matter appears to be more powerful than God (8.1). Besides, if God were Lord of matter before creation, as Hermogenes claims, then God should have rendered it good, unless he lacked the power to do so, in which case God was not Lord of matter at all (9.1–2). Noticeably, Plotinus makes the same point when he argues that matter, however it exists, cannot stay unaffected by the divine realm, since the latter, as the pure actuality of goodness, renders everything good (*Enn.* IV.8.6.18–28).

Tertullian then proceeds to launch a series of arguments to show that Hermogenes' thesis leads to contradictions. First, if matter is wicked and contributes wickedness to the world, as Hermogenes claims, the fact that God used it also makes God accountable for wickedness (*Adv. Herm.* 9.3–5) and, what is more, shows God to be slave to, and collaborator with, wickedness (10.1–4). Such a view not only diminishes the status of God but also suggests that ultimately there is no need for a principle such as God, since the character of the world is sufficiently explained by matter. Such a view, however, is self-contradictory to the extent that it implicitly eliminates God as principle. This leaves the goodness of the world unexplained, which Hermogenes assumes. The question, then, is how the goodness of the world

should be explained. If matter remained true to its nature, the good features of the world could not have come about (12). Something else must then be the case. Either matter changed its nature from wicked to good by itself, or it contained elements of goodness from the very beginning (13.1–2). In either case God is rendered redundant (13.2). An additional possibility is that good things were made neither from matter nor from God, in which case God alone is responsible for the creation of everything wicked (15). By the same token, however, Tertullian claims that God alone could have been responsible for the creation of all good things in the world (16), in which case God must also account for matter. Tertullian implies that the premises of Hermogenes' argument allow for such a conclusion; nothing in it shows that matter is the source of wickedness. Tertullian's conclusion is that creation *ex nihilo* is the only view that does not lead to absurdities.

Tertullian argues skilfully and most of the points he makes against Hermogenes are justified. His own positions, however, also lead to difficulties. The first of these is the issue of how God, an intelligible being, could have created something with a nature so unlike his own – matter. The second is how wickedness came into the world at all. Tertullian does consider the second question and offers an answer to it. Roughly speaking, he takes the view that there is no cosmic principle to account for wickedness; it results from man's misuse of creation (*De spectaculis* 2.11–12). I defer further discussion on this question until Chapter 4 (pp. 145–147). Tertullian does not seem to address the first question, though. He holds that God created *ex nihilo* and at once (*Adv. Herm.* 23–9; cf. *Adv. Marc.* V.19.8) and this happened through the mediation of God's wisdom, that is, God's Son (*Adv. Herm.* 33). We have seen several versions of this view already. In such a view God is retained as the only principle of creation and God's transcendence is confirmed. Tertullian finds it crucial to closely associate God with creation,<sup>78</sup> first because he can thus argue against the Gnostics and Marcion for the goodness of creation that stems directly from God and for the interdependence of reason and goodness,<sup>79</sup> and second because he, like Justin, Theophilus, and Irenaeus, wants to emphasize the teleological aspect of creation, arguing, again against the Gnostic views, that God created for the sake of man (*Res.* 5.6–7), a view that shapes Christian ethics.<sup>80</sup> Yet Tertullian does not tell us exactly how God's creative activity should be conceived. Like Irenaeus, he does not tell us how exactly God brings about matter and material entities. A certain theory of matter is needed here.

Tertullian does not seem to have such a theory. Given his polemical purposes, he sets out to present Hermogenes' view on matter as inconclusive. He argues against Hermogenes' view, according to which matter is neither corporeal nor incorporeal, but partly both, arguing that this is self-contradictory (*Adv. Herm.* 36). Hermogenes' view on matter was probably similar to that of contemporary Platonists,<sup>81</sup> who operated with the originally Stoic distinction between corporeal and incorporeal entities in order to argue that the receptacle in the *Timaeus*, their candidate for matter, is neither of them but has the potential to form a body (Alcinous, *Didask.* 163.3–8). This is the crucial element that would render Hermogenes' view on matter intelligible, but Tertullian leaves it out. He claims instead that

Hermogenes aligned himself with the Stoic view that God is present within matter (*Adv. Herm.* 44.1), which he construed as suggesting that God manifests himself in matter (44.3, 44) – this is why Tertullian accuses Hermogenes of betraying the Stoics. Most likely, however, Hermogenes was guided by the Platonist view, found in Alcinous and Apuleius, that matter is a principle together with God and the Forms. Being a skilled polemicist, Tertullian did not care, of course, to do full justice to Hermogenes' point of view.<sup>82</sup> He cannot hide, though, that a Christian theory of matter is necessary but not yet formulated.

### ***A Platonist view of creation: the case of Clement of Alexandria***

Clement of Alexandria does not articulate a detailed theory of matter either, but he does offer a more articulate view on creation, which is still indebted to the *Timaeus*. Clement sets out to defend such a view in a treatise on the origin of the world, which, if he had indeed written it (*Strom.* IV.1.3.1), has not survived. The aim of the treatise was to carry out the *physiologia* of the Christian Gnostic, that is, to articulate what the Christian wise man should know about nature. Clement suggests that the *physiologia* amounts to contemplation (*epopteia*) and depends on the study of cosmogony, which leads to theology (*Strom.* IV.1.3.1).<sup>83</sup> Such a statement is indicative of Clement's attachment to the *Timaeus*, a dialogue concerned with both physics and theology.

Clement follows the *Timaeus* in approaching the question of cosmogony through a distinction between the intelligible and the sensible realm (*Tim.* 27d–28a). Clement suggests that Genesis 1.1–3, which describes the earth as “invisible”, refers to the intelligible world (*Strom.* V.14.93.4–94.3), and only from 1.6 onwards does it refer to the sensible world. Clement goes on to argue that the intelligible world is the model for the creation of the sensible world (V.14.93.4).<sup>84</sup> Drawing on Philo (*De opif.* 13–16, 29–31, 36–39, 55), Clement admits that this idea occurs in Hellenic philosophy, especially in Plato and the Pythagoreans, but he argues that Plato in the *Timaeus* follows Moses in maintaining that the world was created by a single principle, namely God (*Strom.* V.14.92.1–4). More specifically, Clement claims first that the world came into being by the agency of a creator who is also the father of the world, a reference to *Timaeus* 28c (V.14.92.3). Second, when reviewing the ancient theories of matter (V.13.89.4–7), Clement singles out Plato's view that matter lacks quality and shape (*apoiós kai aschēmatistos*) and qualifies as “non-being” (*mē on*).

This view of matter had become widespread among Platonists of Clement's generation. It was Aristotle who first identified Plato's receptacle with matter, which he characterized as non-being (*Phys.* 192a3–14), as a qualityless and formless entity (*aides kai amorphon*; *De caelo* 306b17–19). This view was accepted by Platonists, first by Antiochus<sup>85</sup> and later by Alcinous.<sup>86</sup> But, while Clement agrees with this Platonist conception of matter, he disagrees with the Platonist view that matter qualifies as a principle. Clement rather claims that in the *Timaeus* the only

principle is God (*Strom.* V.13.89.6, citing *Tim.* 48c2–6).<sup>87</sup> Clement’s obvious motivation is to show that Scripture and Plato agree in acknowledging God as a single principle of creation. The fact, however, that Clement, unlike Theophilus, accepts the view that the creator is like a craftsman (*Protr.* 4.51), has been taken to suggest that Clement considers matter to be pre-existing.<sup>88</sup> The craftsman analogy, though, does not necessarily imply the acceptance of pre-existing matter, as the case of Irenaeus shows. Photius (ninth century) claims to have found this view in Clement’s lost *Hypotypōseis* (*Bibliotheca* 109). The existing evidence about Clement suggests, however, that this is quite unlikely.

In a remarkable passage in his *Protrepticus*, Clement stresses that God creates only through his will (*Protr.* 63.3),<sup>89</sup> and he goes on to distinguish this view from that of the Presocratics who, as he claims, postulated a material cause (64.1–2). Clement makes clear that God’s will is identical with his *Logos*, the Son of God. More specifically, Clement identifies the *Logos* with the wisdom, power, and will of God (*thelēma*; *Strom.* V.1.6.3; *boulēma*; *Protr.* 63.3),<sup>90</sup> or with the wisdom, the knowledge, and the truth of God (*Strom.* IV.25.156.1). Like other contemporary Christian thinkers, such as Justin, Irenaeus, and Tertullian, Clement makes the Son of God, rather than God the Father, more immediately involved with creation (*Strom.* V.3.16.5).<sup>91</sup> However, he goes further than them in maintaining that there is common ground between Plato and the Scriptures in this regard as well. Clement goes so far as to suggest that the three gods mentioned in the (pseudo-)Platonic second Letter prefigure the Holy Trinity (*Strom.* V.14.102.5–103.1). He claims that God’s Son is the one “through whom everything was created” (*di’ hou panta egeneto*; V.14.102.5–103.1). Elsewhere Clement calls God “the principle of everything” (*tōn olōn archē*; V.6.38.7), apparently of everything created, the “cause of creation” (V.3.16.5), or the “cause of all goods” (*Protr.* 1.7.1). Such passages show beyond any reasonable doubt, I think, that for Clement God alone, and not matter, is the principle of creation.

The question, of course, is how God carries out creation through his wisdom or the *Logos*. Like Irenaeus and Tertullian, Clement avoids a straightforward answer to this question. In a cryptic passage he seems to claim that the Forms are concepts of God (*Strom.* V.3.16.1–4), which suggests that the divine wisdom hosts the Forms of everything created.<sup>92</sup> And in the same context he says that the *Logos* generates himself when he becomes flesh (V.3.16.5). But we do not have any clear evidence about exactly how, according to Clement, God’s wisdom realizes creation. The first to address this question concretely is Origen.

## Origen

With Origen the issue of cosmogony takes on new dimensions – he understands that it contains two levels of complexity. The first concerns the status of the Christian God as a principle of generation of the universe. The second concerns the implications of cosmogony for human nature.<sup>93</sup> The second concern arises from the realization that the issue of the wickedness of the world cannot be addressed

properly unless one appreciates and adequately explains human vice, which is a kind of wickedness. It does not suffice to say, as Tertullian did, for instance, that God is not responsible for the evils in the world but only man is, for man is part of God's creation. One must have a theory of man's creation as part of a general theory of creation, which would explain how man is able to determine himself and his actions; otherwise the blame for man's vice would still be laid, at least partly, on the creator. Origen is not the first to realize this,<sup>94</sup> but he is the first to construct a theory to address the issue.

Origen's overall approach to cosmology is characterized by the determination to clarify the content of the concepts involved in the enquiry and to build on his findings. Central to this endeavour is of course the concept of *kosmos*. Origen acknowledges that the term admits of various definitions, such as: (a) the visible world, the earth and its inhabitant species; (b) the universe, including the heavenly realm, that is, the sensible world but not the intelligible world, something which Christ alludes to when he says that his kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36); (c) both the sensible and the intelligible world (*Princ.* II.3.6). Origen makes two moves here. First, he considers *kosmos* in the broad sense, (c), namely "the entire universe and everything that exists in it", which includes the celestial and supra-celestial sphere, earthly and infernal regions, because he does not want to leave anything out of God's jurisdiction (*Princ.* II.3.6).<sup>95</sup> Second, he maintains that God is not part of the *kosmos* (*ibid.*); for if God is part of a whole such as the universe, then God would be incomplete, and this is not adequate to the notion of God (*C. Cels.* I.23). As we have seen, the idea that God is part of the universe was suggested by Hermogenes as an unwanted corollary of the view that God created only out of himself. Origen wants to preclude this corollary, doing so by arguing that God transcends the created universe. This is not to be taken in the sense that God is external to, or has no contact with, the universe, but in the sense that God is ontologically different from it: God is uncreated and eternal, while the universe is created and subject to change. Origen highlights a point already made by Justin, Irenaeus, and Clement.

The other important notion that Origen seeks to clarify is that of "creation" in the specific sense of divine creation. What do we actually mean when we say that God created? And what do we believe when we affirm that "God created the world"? Origen appears to suggest that this proposition makes sense only if we assume that God created *ex nihilo* and that the view of those who maintain that God created out of pre-existing matter rests on a notion of "creation" leads to absurdities. Origen tries to show which these are. His argument takes the form of *reductio ad absurdum*.

If we assume that matter pre-existed creation, Origen argues, then we also admit that creation took place because God happened to have matter at his disposal, and this means that if there was no matter, God could not have been a creator and thus not a benefactor (Origen in Eusebius, *P.E.* VII.20.2–3). Such a belief, however, diminishes God's potency and freedom of decision as well as God's goodness (*P.E.* VII.20.3) because God's goodness exists to the extent that God is beneficent, as

Irenaeus had already pointed out, and according to that belief God's beneficence is contingent on matter. Origen goes further, suggesting that on such a view creation has no proper cause.<sup>96</sup> It is not immediately clear, though, why God does not count as a cause if creation depends on pre-existing matter. Presumably Origen takes the view that something qualifies as a cause only if it is entirely responsible for a certain effect. This view must be partly inspired by the Stoic notion of cause. While for the Stoics something qualifies as a cause if it is active, for Origen an entity qualifies as a cause if it the sole active one.<sup>97</sup>

Origen goes on to point out that the view of creation from pre-existing matter is absurd in other regards too. For, he claims, it is not the case that the world is created out of matter; rather, the world is created out of a certain kind of matter, namely informed matter, and there is no inert, remaining matter, as happens in the case of human craftsmen. Origen argues that this is indicative of the status of matter.

When the Scripture says that God created "all things by number and measure" [Wisdom of Solomon 11:20], we will be right in applying the term "number" to rational creatures or intellects for this very reason, that they are so many as can be provided for and ruled and controlled by God's providence; "measure" on the other hand will correspondingly apply to corporeal matter, and we must believe to have been created by God in such quantity as he knew would be sufficient for the ordering of the world. All this was created by God at the beginning before everything else. It is this, we believe, that is suggested obscurely by Moses when he says that "In the beginning God made the heavens and the earth" [Genesis I:1].

(*Princ.* II.9.1)

This passage appears to suggest creation taking place in two stages: first matter and then the rest of the created entities, a view implied in the *Timaeus* (e.g. 69b–c) and which was probably taken, as has been shown, by Tatian. But creation in two stages does not have to be understood in a literal sense. The point that Origen wants to make in this passage is that God is the creator of matter employed in creation and that this matter is of a certain nature and is characterized by measure. This is so important to Origen that he repeats it near the end of *On Principles* (IV.4.8) and elaborates on this point in several places in his work. He argues that the matter used in creation was not only of a certain quantity (*Princ.* II.1.4) but of a certain kind (*tosautē kai toiautē*, Eusebius, *P.E.* VII.20.5, 8). Matter, he claims, was malleable enough to admit of (*dektikē, eiktikē*) the properties bestowed upon it by the creator (*P.E.* VII.20.5, 9). If matter was equipped with such features by itself, Origen goes on to say, that would mean that the world was created by itself in a kind of spontaneous generation. But this is absurd, he says, because the ability of matter to take on such different forms suggests that it is not a product of chance but of wisdom (*sophia*) and providence (*pronoia*); otherwise, matter would not transform itself in ways that contribute to the beauty and order of the world (*Princ.* II.1.4). The fact

that it does suggests that matter has a nature such that it contributes to the orderly arrangement of the world (in *P.E.* VII.20.4), as food does to the human body.

The view that matter has a rational nature that becomes evident in its transformations (e.g. water–ice) goes back to *Timaeus* 53a–56c. Origen must have also been inspired by the teleological view of philosophers such as Alexander and Plotinus, according to which something has the aptitude (*epitedeiotēs*) for receiving further specification because it is already of a certain nature. Only a certain kind of body, for instance, is capable of acquiring a soul, and only a certain ensouled body can acquire an intellect.<sup>98</sup> In a manner reminiscent of the Stoics, Origen claims that matter received from God the reasons or forms (*logous*) of all things, and thus everything came into being.<sup>99</sup> But how exactly does Origen conceive of matter? The following passage is illuminating in this regard:

By “matter” we mean that which underlies bodies, namely that from which they take their existence when also qualities have been applied to, or mingled with, them. We speak of four qualities, heat, cold, dryness, wetness. These qualities when mingled with matter (which matter is clearly seen to exist in its own right apart from these qualities mentioned before) produce the different kinds of bodies. But although, as has been said, this matter has an existence by its own right without qualities, yet it is never found actually existing apart from them.

(*Princ.* II.1.4)

One thing that this passage tells us is that Origen sharply distinguishes between matter and bodies on the one hand and between matter and qualities on the other. Bodies, he claims, consist of matter and qualities, yet matter, he suggests, is never found without qualities. A closer look at the text is required here. This part of Origen’s *On Principles* unfortunately survives only in the fourth-century Latin translation of Rufinus.<sup>100</sup> Matter (*materia* for the Greek term *hylē*) is said to underlie bodies, *subiecta corporibus*.<sup>101</sup> The term *subiecta* probably translates the Greek term *hypokeimenon* found in Plato (e.g. *Rep.* 581c) and which Aristotle uses for the receptacle (*Phys.* 192a31; *De caelo* 306b17), which he identifies with matter. The term is employed by later Platonists to indicate matter as a formless entity admitting of qualities, a kind of substrate; Plotinus is one such example in this regard (*Enn.* II.4.1.1, II.4.4.7, 12.22). The case of Origen must be similar; he speaks of the four qualities that matter admits, mentioned in *Timaeus* 49d–50b. He does not further explain the nature of the substrate in which qualities inhere. The manner in which Origen speaks, however, suggests that this substrate does not amount to much, as I shall explain below, but rather is a theoretical construction.

Origen appears to be speaking of two aspects of creation. The first is the creation of the principles, patterns, and reasons (*initia, rationes/logous, species; Princ.* II.2.2) imposed on matter by God. It is in accordance with them that everything is created, in the same way that a house or a ship is built by the imposition of the form of house or ship on the materials.<sup>102</sup> These reasons, which God imposes on matter,

are also created by God and are a feature of his wisdom as “a system of objects of contemplation”.<sup>103</sup>

It is in this wisdom that there exists every capacity and form of the future creation, both of the primary beings as well as of the secondary ones, which were fashioned and arranged by the power of foreknowledge. For in this wisdom are hosted and prefigured all created things, and this wisdom, speaking through Solomon, says that she was created as “a beginning of the ways” of God, which means that she contains in herself the origins, the reasons, and the species of the entire creation.

(*Princ.* I.2.2)

Origen identifies divine wisdom with God’s Son, Christ (*Princ.* I.2.1), who is said to be operating as principle of creation (*hōs archē*) to the extent that he is the wisdom of God (*sophia*; *In Joh.* I.19.111).<sup>104</sup> Origen claims that divine wisdom operates as a principle in the sense that “everything comes to be in accordance with wisdom” (*In Joh.* I.19.111). Such a formulation implies that this wisdom is not the ultimate principle of creation but rather a secondary one. For Origen the most fundamental sense of creation is that of the creation of the reasons, forms, or patterns in accordance with which everything is made, since “it is because of this creation that all creation has also been able to subsist” (*In Joh.* I.34). The cause of this fundamental or primary creation, Origen claims, is God the Father.

To the extent that the product of this primary creation amounts to the contents of the divine wisdom, it is understandable why Origen says that God’s wisdom, the Son, was created by God (*creata esse*; *Princ.* I.2.3; *egenēthē*; *C. Cels.* V.39). The term “created” is not to be taken temporally here, since it is said of an eternal being, God’s son; as Origen says, this is an eternal and everlasting generation (*Princ.* I.2.4, IV.4.1). The term is rather used to distinguish between cause and effect.<sup>105</sup> Origen conceives of this distinction in terms of a distinction between a first and a second God (*C. Cels.* V.39), in a way similar to the one we find in Numenius and Alcinoüs.<sup>106</sup> It is noteworthy that Origen speaks of the first God as “reason in itself, wisdom in itself, justice in itself” (*autologos, autosophia, autodikaiosynē*), in whom the second God participates. This language is reminiscent of how Numenius speaks of the first and second God (*autoagathon* vs. *agathos*).<sup>107</sup> Athanasius later uses the same language to describe the Son of God (*C. Gentes* 46.56–58).

The fact that Origen distinguishes between a first and a second cause in creation, namely God and his Wisdom, the Son or *Logos*, does not mean that he takes the two entities as subsisting, because then God would be composite (*Princ.* I.1.6). Origen rather names God in the singular as the cause of creation (*Princ.* III.6.7); God and his *Logos* are distinguished only in terms of function. The former is primarily the creator of the intelligible reasons or the creator of being and only secondarily the creator of the sensible world, to the extent that he acts through the *Logos* or Wisdom.<sup>108</sup> The latter is the cause of creation in the sense that he brings about the sensible world. Origen maintains that the world as such is eternal, a testimony to



divine goodness, but this particular world, given its sensible, corporeal nature, will perish. He thus distinguishes between the world that has always been – that is, the intelligible reasons – and its ages or *aeons* of the world, which succeed one another in sequence (*Princ.* II.1.3, II.3.4–5). This is reminiscent of the Stoic view of the eternal regeneration of the world (*palingenesis*); we find a similar distinction in Severus, who relies on the myth of the *Politicus*, according to which there are two cycles of the universe’s motion (Proclus, *In Tim.* I.289.7–12).<sup>109</sup> Both Severus and Origen want to dissociate creation from temporal beginning. This particular view of Origen confirms that, for him, the most fundamental sense of creation is that of the incorporeal, intelligible reasons, because they sustain the world in its transformations.

If creation for Origen amounts primarily to the creation of reasons and patterns in accordance with which all beings are created, one then wonders exactly how in his view corporeal beings were created. Although Origen speaks of matter as an underlying substrate, it does not play a role in the constitution of bodies; the essential element is the reasons which inform matter and make up all bodies. Changes in bodies concern qualities, not matter (*Princ.* II.1.4). Presumably, then, matter as substrate is a non-being, as in Clement and in Plotinus, and individual bodies are nothing but conglomerations of qualities resulting from the imposition of reasons originating in divine wisdom. Creation in this sense would then amount to the instantiation or projection of divine reasons onto matter.<sup>110</sup> On such a view God’s wisdom permeates and shapes the entire world. What is more, on such a theory the only principle of creation is God.

Origen, however, sees one considerable danger in his theory, which is that the principle of creation is also accountable for the wickedness in the world. As I mentioned earlier, Origen is extremely sensitive to this idea, and his account of cosmogony is shaped by an effort to find a way out of this difficulty. Origen maintains that the diversity among rational creatures, including humans, in terms of natural features, talents, and inclinations, is neither arbitrary nor the result of God’s decision, but rather due to the choice of the intellects themselves (*Princ.* II.9.6). These intellects, he suggests, pre-exist (*prohyphestanai*) and lead a life (*Princ.* I.8.4).<sup>111</sup> The question, though, is what this life involves and, especially, which aspect of this life decides the soul’s fortune when it is in the body. Origen’s answer is that these intellects are capable of thinking; their living amounts to having thoughts and desires for either the good or the bad. Origen suggests that the propensities and inclinations the disembodied intellects finally develop determine their characters and the course of their lives when they become embodied. According to such a theory, God emerges as absolutely righteous and fair because he created all human intellects equal and they alone are responsible for their fate. I shall examine this issue in detail in Chapter 4 (pp. 151–157).

### ***Creation implies a beginning: Basil on creation***

Basil is deeply engaged with the interpretation of cosmogony and God’s role in it. His *Homilies in Hexaemeron*, a set of nine homilies on the six days of creation as

outlined in the opening chapters of Genesis, is a landmark of early Christian philosophical literature on this topic. Basil takes issue both with those who maintain that formless matter pre-exists creation and with those who instead argue that God is the creator of the world not in the sense of actually having created it but rather in the sense of being its principle.<sup>112</sup> The former group, as has been seen, consists of various Christians, including Gnostics, as well as Platonists who interpreted the *Timaeus* literally. Basil advances arguments against them that we have already encountered. He argues, for instance, that such a view implies God's inability to create on his own, which diminishes God's status (*Hex.* 2.2). And he adds that matter, insofar as it is privation, is evil, which means that matter cannot be a principle of something as good as the world.<sup>113</sup> This, however, is a dialectical move, because, as we shall see, Basil does not believe that there is such a thing as matter.<sup>114</sup> The other group of adversaries are those Platonists who defend a metaphorical interpretation of the *Timaeus*, according to which creation should be understood not as a process but in the sense of God's being the only cause responsible for the coming into being of the world. On this interpretation (which resembles Origen's), there is not a temporal but only an ontological and causal relationship between God and the world. Quite importantly, on this interpretation creation is not something that actually took place but rather a label for a metaphysical relation between a cause, God, and its effect, the world.<sup>115</sup> Platonists and Origen tried to illustrate this relation through metaphors like that of the sun and the light, which suggest that cause and effect are coeternal.<sup>116</sup> Basil argues against this position, and, in my view, it is here that his contribution partly lies.

Basil does not want to avoid the coeternity of God and matter at the cost of allowing the coeternity of God and the world. While the former undermines God's omnipotence and freedom, the latter undermines God's ontological status as a unique entity and denies him the exercise of his will. God as a transcendent, intelligible being cannot be coeternal with any other entity because he is also a being that has a will (*boulēma*), which must prevail and which he realizes in the act of creation. Those who portray God as a cause of a coeternal creation, denying that the world was generated (*gegenēsthai*) by God and claiming that the world came into being spontaneously (*automatōs*; *Hex.* I.17, 17C), imply that creation took place without God's wanting it (*aprouairetōs*; *Hex.* I.17, 17C). On this view, God's being was sufficient for the world to come into being.<sup>117</sup> This, however, Basil argues, is not what Genesis suggests. Basil claims that it is significant that Genesis employs the term *epoiēsen*, "made", and not *enērgēsen*, "actualized", or *hypestēsen*, "brought about" (*Hex.* 1.7, 17BC). Basil argues that such terminology indicates the deliberate intervention of a divine craftsman possessing a will.

This does not have to mean, however, that creation in this sense must have taken place at some point in time. With regard to Genesis 1.1, Basil argues that the beginning (*archē*) of *X* is not yet *X*; neither does it indicate a minuscule part of time, but a timeless moment in which creation takes place all at once (*athroōs*; *Hex.* 1.6). Basil thus rejects a temporal interpretation of creation, arguing that creation took place outside of time. In accordance with the *Timaeus* (38b–39e), Basil claims that

time came about with the world, and especially with the movement of planets (*C. Eun.* I.21, 360ab). And he agrees with Platonists such as Porphyry that the world came into being at once, but unlike Porphyry Basil argues for a temporal priority between God and the world and appears to assume that this kind of priority is intrinsic to the concept of creation (*Hex.* I.1, 4A).

The question, though, is what exactly cosmogony amounts to on this view. Basil argues that God created the heavens and the earth as the foundations and the limits of the created world (*Hex.* 1.7). He appears to consider the order of the world as the work of a cosmic *sympatheia*, an originally Stoic notion (*SVF* II.170) also used by Philo and Plotinus,<sup>118</sup> and he suggests that begetting implies “affinity of nature” (*tēn tēs phuseōs oikeiōtēta*; *C. Eun.* II.24.23). Basil becomes more precise on this point, claiming that the created world is a sum of qualities mixed with each other (*Hex.* 1.7, 20AB; 4.5, 89BD). He suggests, for instance, that in earth we also find water and fire. These qualities in their mixture make up everything there is; heaven and earth are created in this sense. Thus, Basil argues, there is no need to assume a material substrate (*hypokeimenon*; *Hex.* 1.8, 21B), as Origen did, or the domination of one element, as Aristotle believed is the case of the heavens, such as the indestructible aether (*Hex.* 1.11, 25AB). This is how he outlines his position:

In the same way we would argue also with respect to the earth, without going into detailed investigations about what its substance (*ousia*) can be and without wasting time trying to find the substrate (*hypokeimenon*) or search for a nature devoid of qualities which is unqualified (*apoiōs*) and exists of itself. We should know that all qualities that we see in it are arranged in accordance with the notion of being (*einaī*), existing as constituents of substance (*symplērōtika tēs ousias yparxonta*). You will arrive in nothing if you try to abstract each of the qualities existing in it. If you take out the black, the cold, the heavy, the dense, the qualities concerning the taste, or any other qualities that are seen, there will be no substrate.

(*On Hexaemeron* 1.8, 21B)

Basil uses the term “substance” (*ousia*) in two senses here, rejecting one and approving of the other. The former, Basil suggests, amounts to qualityless matter, the equivalent of substrate, while the latter amounts to the sum of constitutive qualities.<sup>119</sup> The expression *symplērōtika tēs ousias* is crucial here; it does not mean “complementary of substance” but rather “constitutive of substance”, because for Basil there is nothing other than qualities which constitute substance. Plotinus and Porphyry speak similarly. Plotinus speaks of qualities constitutive of substance and of those that are not, and he accordingly distinguishes between essential and accidental qualities (*Enn.* II.6.1.18–31).<sup>120</sup> Basil makes a similar distinction. He suggests that every sensible entity has one particular “distinguishing quality that characterizes the nature of the subject”,<sup>121</sup> the proper quality or distinguishing property (*idion, idiōma*; *Hex.* 4.5, 89B). For water, this quality is coldness; for fire, heat; for earth, dryness; for man, reason (*Hex.* 4.5).

Basil applies this theory to divine substance, too; he suggests that “goodness” is “concurrent” (*syndromon*) with God’s substance in the same manner as heat is with fire (*De spirito sancto* 8.21). And in *Against Eunomius* (*C. Eun.* II.29, 640ab), Basil says that “life”, “light”, and “goodness” are different “ways of indicating [God’s] distinctive property” (*idiotēs*). Different things may have a nominally identical property, such as sweetness, which, however, differs from one thing to the other; the sweetness of a fig is different from that of grapes and of apples (*Hex.* 5.8, 113BC). It is the proper sweetness of a fig that marks it as a fig. When this property changes, the nature of a thing is altered, too. Such a quality should be distinguished from accidental or non-essential qualities. Basil argues that none of these kinds of qualities can be abstracted from substance except in theory (*epinoiai*; *Hex.* 6.3, 121C).

The question is, of course, what keeps these qualities together. Basil argues that it is God’s power that unifies qualities in things (*tēi dynamei tou ktisantos ēnōtai*; *Hex.* 6.3, 121C). This means that there is nothing in the things themselves that keeps the qualities together, such as a certain substrate in which the qualities inhere, or, alternatively, a form.<sup>122</sup> Even essential qualities do not account for a thing’s unity; rather, the unifying element, in Basil’s view, is God’s power. One may wonder here how God’s power unites things. As far as I can see, Basil does not explain how this happens. It seems, however, that this unification is not an additional activity of God but rather the effect of the original unity of qualities in God’s thought, which is always there and guarantees the existence of the world.

Basil’s theory is strikingly similar to Porphyry’s view that a characteristic property (*idion*; *Isag.* 12.17–22) or an essential quality (*In Cat.* 95.22–33) contribute to the nature of a thing (*Isag.* 7.19–24, *In Cat.* 128.34–129.10). It is an integral part of Porphyry’s theory that sensible entities are bundles of qualities, which is originally Plotinus’ theory (*Enn.* VI.3.8.19–37). Porphyry, however, takes Plotinus’ theory a step further when he suggests that God creates by providing the reasons (*logoi*) of everything there is, which amount to the qualities of all bodies.<sup>123</sup> Basil does not explicitly say this with reference to creation, but he implies it when he speaks in the passage cited above of the constitutive qualities of sensible things. His idea must be that God creates by providing the *logoi* of all bodies and by uniting them and keeping them together. Gregory of Nyssa develops this theory further, as we will see presently.

Basil insists that God is not responsible for wickedness (*Hex.* 6.7). He suggests that natural disasters, for instance, should not be considered instances of wickedness, and the same holds for death, illness, poverty, and pain, because they happen by nature and often are beneficial (*Hex.* 2.5, 40B). In Basil’s view, the true origin of wickedness is to be found in man when his soul falls away from goodness (*Hex.* 2.5, 40B). In this sense wickedness should not be sought outside man and it is nothing but a privation of goodness, which we alone bring about; in this sense we, humans, are the only cause of evils (*Hex.* 2.5, 40B). As I mentioned earlier, this was also Plotinus’ view, as well as the view that Athanasius endorses; Athanasius considers

wickedness to be non-being, which is brought about by man alone, while he identifies being with goodness, that is God (*C. Gentes* 7.1–3; see further Chapter 4, p. 159 and n. 89).

### ***The world is a world of thoughts: Gregory of Nyssa***

Despite their many merits, neither Origen's nor Basil's theories directly address the question of how it is possible for an immaterial principle like God to create the material universe and the material entities in it, although they suggest a possible way of tackling the issue. This, however, is a question that needs to be properly addressed. It is insufficient to claim that God created *ex nihilo* on the grounds that the postulation of pre-existing matter leads to absurd conclusions; one also needs to show how it is conceptually possible that God is the cause of something as essentially different from him as the material world. An answer to that question requires a theory about the nature of matter. Only then can a theory of creation *ex nihilo* be fully supported. Gregory of Nyssa takes up precisely this task. This is how he presents the issue:

You can hear people saying things like this: if God is without matter, then where does matter come from? How does the quantity come from lack of quantity, the visible from the invisible, what is defined in terms of mass and size from what lacks dimension and limits? And so with the other features seen in matter too: how or whence were they produced by someone who has nothing in his nature that pertains to matter?

(*Apology for Hexaemeron* 69B)

Gregory undertakes to address this question by developing the views we find in Origen and especially in Basil. Gregory maintains that matter as such does not exist; what does exist, he claims, are qualities such as cold and hot, dry and humid, light and heavy, colour and shape; their convergence (*syndromē poiōtētōn*) constitutes what we call matter (*Apology for Hex.* 69C).<sup>124</sup> These qualities are not themselves of a material nature either; rather, they are concepts (*ennoiai*) or thoughts (*noēmata*) in God's intellect and have always existed in that form (*Apol.* 69C). God did not actually create matter but rather, through an act of will, he created all beings out of the thoughts in his intellect. This requires some explanation, but let us first see how Gregory outlines his view on God's contribution to creation.

Being capable of everything, by his wise and powerful will, he [God] established for the creation of beings all things through which matter is constituted: light, heavy, dense, rare, soft, resistant, humid, dry, cold, hot, colour, shape, outline, extension. All these are in themselves concepts (*ennoiai*) and bare thoughts (*psila noēmata*). None of them is matter on its own, but they become matter when they combine with each other.

(*Apology for Hexaemeron* 69C)

This is not an *ad hoc* answer to the question of the nature of matter but rather part of a fairly sophisticated theory that permeates Gregory's entire work. Gregory articulates his theory in his *Apology for Hexaemeron* (*Apol.*), in *On the Soul and Resurrection* (*De an.*), and *On the Creation of Man* (*De hom. opif.*). We find Gregory's theory of matter in works as varied as these because Gregory needs such a theory not only in order to explain cosmogony but also to explain the resurrection of the body. More precisely, he needs a theory of matter that would support his argument that the resurrection of the body is possible despite the fact that the body disintegrates and dissolves after death. It was important for him to vindicate this thesis because Celsus and Porphyry argued that the resurrection of the body is a logical impossibility.<sup>125</sup> We notice some differences, however, between the accounts of the theory of matter in Gregory's works. While in the *Apology* the qualities are considered constitutive of matter, in the other two works they are constituents of bodies and termed *logoi*.

None of the things that pertains to the body is on its own a body, neither shape, nor colour, nor weight, nor extension, nor size, nor any other of the things regarded as qualities, but each of them is a *logos* and their combination and union with each other makes a body. Since these qualities which complement the body are grasped by the intellect and not by sense-perception and since the divine is intellectual (*noēron*), what is the problem for him [i.e. God] to create the thoughts (*noēmata*) of the intelligible entities (*noēta*), whose combination with each other produces corporeal nature for our sake?  
(*On the Soul and Resurrection* 124CD, GNO 94.8-15)

In this passage Gregory again makes clear that bodies are not made up of matter but of intelligible entities, the qualities or *logoi*, which are hosted by the divine intellect and by the human intellect. Creation of sensible, corporeal entities amounts to the combination of the *logoi* of God; we, humans, in turn are able to know these entities by combining the *logoi*, the qualities, that make them up. Gregory spells out how this happens in the following passage:

We find out that matter is made up of constitutive qualities. If matter is deprived of those qualities, it will not be cognized by reason. In fact, we distinguish each kind of quality in the substrate through reason. And reason pertains to the intellect, not to the body. Suppose that an animal or a piece of wood is presented for us to consider, or anything else that has a corporeal constitution. By a process of mental division (*kat' epinoian diairesei*) we recognize many things connected with the substrate, and the *logos* of each of them is not mixed up with the other things that we are considering at the same time. For the *logos* of colour and of weight is different, and also is the one of quantity and of tangible quality. For softness and two-cubit length and the other things predicated are not conflated with each other nor with the body in our *logos* of them.

(*On the Creation of Man* 212D-213A)

Gregory's main point in this passage is that we perceive each *logos* as distinct from any other. The epistemic distinctiveness of *logoi* (e.g. of colour and size) is not an illusion, but rather the consequence of their being distinct in reality. Although *logoi* are presented to us united in bodies, we nevertheless distinguish them so clearly that we cannot confuse the *logos* of the colour of red with that of a triangular shape, for instance. Our ability to make infallible distinctions suggests to Gregory that *logoi* are also distinct in reality as constituents of matter. This, in his view, means that they are distinct in the divine mind as well. In Gregory's view, God does not create by combining his own thoughts, the *logoi*; rather, God's thoughts combine as qualities when they emanate from the divine mind. In this sense the constituents of matter have their patterns in God's intellect, but matter as such does not. For Gregory, it is an act of divine will that is primarily responsible for the creation of *logoi*, a view similar to that of Origen, who conceives of creation mainly as the begetting of *logoi*. This does not mean, of course, that in Origen's view God is not responsible for the combination of *logoi*. Gregory's idea seems to be that as soon as the *logoi* are established in the mind of God they are projected out of it, and this amounts to the world's coming into being.

This idea may be taken to imply a two-stage process of creation: the creation of the *logoi* in the divine mind and their subsequent projection, or the creation of patterns and their realization.<sup>126</sup> I find this rather implausible, first because there is nothing in Gregory's formulations to make this compelling, and secondly because creation in two stages is vulnerable to objections of creation as process. The point upon which all of Gregory's relevant texts converge is that God is the creator of the material world without being the creator of matter; matter is rather an epiphenomenon resulting from the combination of qualities that make up bodies, and it is these qualities that God creates and combines.

Gregory's theory displays striking affinities with the views of Plotinus and Porphyry.<sup>127</sup> As mentioned earlier, Plotinus maintains that sensible entities are nothing but bundles of qualities (*Enn.* VI.3.8.12–32). He speaks of matter as substrate in which qualities inhere, and he also speaks of an intelligible model of matter (I.8.3.4–18, II.4.5.15–24),<sup>128</sup> something that Gregory does not do. Plotinus invites us to distinguish between the enmattered Forms and matter, which he considers a mere shadow, a false appearance that is not graspable by our intellect and ultimately a non-being (*Enn.* II.4.6.15–18, II.9.12.38–40, I.8.3.1–6, VI.3.8.32–37). Plotinus, like Gregory, corroborates his metaphysical view that material entities are bundles of qualities with an epistemological argument according to which we come to know material entities by conceiving their constitutive elements, the qualities or *logoi*. Porphyry develops Plotinus' theory further while addressing the problem that Gregory was facing, namely how God as an intelligible entity creates material entities. Porphyry's answer is, as I have said earlier, that such entities are bundles of qualities that come into being as a result of the flow of divine thoughts.<sup>129</sup> More specifically, Porphyry argues that the divine mind contains the elements of the coming into being of everything in the same way that semen or a seed contains the reasons for the coming into being of an animal or a plant. In Porphyry's view,

though, the case of divine creation of the world differs in two aspects; first, there is no need even for the tiny amount of matter that is a seed or semen to accommodate the *logoi*; second, the creation of the world by God is not a process, as is the case with what comes into being from seeds and semen, but something that happens all at once (*athroōs*).<sup>130</sup>

Gregory's cosmological theory is close to Porphyry's both in content and terminology. Like Porphyry, Gregory speaks of the seminal power through which God creates everything (*Apol.* 77D),<sup>131</sup> and he suggests that God created all at once (*athroōs*).<sup>132</sup> Gregory differs from Porphyry, however, in the manner in which he justifies his theory. As far as I can see, Gregory's ideas display considerable originality here. His arguments in support of the view that matter amounts to bundles of qualities that make up material entities suggest a theory of the conservation of matter similar in spirit to modern theories of matter.

Gregory claims that matter of material entities is constantly transformed; the water of the rain makes the earth humid, the sun makes humidity evaporate, that is, it turns it into a kind of air, and so on (*Apol.* 93B–96A). When fire burns oil, for instance, Gregory argues, it is not only the case that fire consumes the humid element and makes it dry, but the mass is also diffused into the air as dry dust – this is why the smoke of a lantern blackens anything above it (97B). The oil does not disappear, but becomes transformed into different material elements, such as dust, which shows that matter consists of those qualities that emerge in the body's dissolution (97CD). Instances of dissolution of bodies show that several different elements come about from one body: air, water, dust, and so on. This is all that constitutes a body (*C. Eun.* II.949, GNO 259.26–260.25). Material bodies are dissolved in the same way that they are created, Gregory claims. This is confirmed, he argues, by the way craftsmen make artefacts.

Gregory's answer, then, to the question of how an immaterial God created a material world is to say that the question is misguided because the world is not actually material at all; it is rather constituted of reasons or qualities (*logoi*), which are created in the divine mind and cognized by human minds. This does not mean, of course, that Gregory denies the existence of material entities; he denies existence to matter. For Gregory the world and everything in it have an objective existence insofar as they consist of intelligible entities, the *logoi*, that have an objective existence, insofar as they exist in the divine mind.

Scholars have noticed the similarities between Gregory's and Berkeley's theories.<sup>133</sup> Indeed, Gregory shares with Berkeley the view that the reasons for everything there is exist in God's mind. For Gregory the creation of the world consists in God's having these very reasons, not in their becoming perceptible to man, as Berkeley claims. In this sense Gregory's theory is unlike Berkeley's idealism, which reduces matter to the act of perception. Gregory's theory is rather closer to the position of John Locke, who holds that material substances are made up of qualities; all we know of them are the nominal and not the real essences, that is, we know only their attributes (*Essay* II.31.6–10, III.3.15–19). Gregory's view clearly approaches Locke's when he claims that we do not know the account



of substance (*ton tēs ousias logon*), of the elements of the world, although we know them through sense-perception (*aisthēsei*; *C. Eun.* II.949, GNO 259.26–260.13). At any rate, Gregory's view is a highly sophisticated philosophical theory and an important supplement to Christian cosmological theories of creation *ex nihilo*.

### First principles and divine persons: the Christian concept of God

From what has been said so far, it becomes clear that a certain conception of the Christian God informs the Christian interpretation of cosmogony. For as we have seen, only a cosmogonical account that avoids any implications of God's impotency, wickedness, or limited freedom is acceptable. God is clearly a cluster concept for Christian philosophers, just as was the case for their pagan contemporaries; God is reason, good, benevolent, beneficial, omnipotent, omniscient, absolutely free. This conception of God shapes both the Christian cosmogonical account and the Christian theory of principles of reality, more generally. Christians, as we have seen, cannot agree with the Platonist view on principles in either the three-tier (God, Forms, matter) or two-tier (God and matter) formulation, because for them God is the sole principle of the world. The ontological disparity between God and the world, however, stands in tension with the view that God is the world's only principle because it leaves God's relation to a radically different entity unexplained. As we have seen, Origen, Basil, and particularly Gregory tried to address this issue. This was, however, not the only issue. As we have seen, one other issue was the capacity in which God was involved in creation.

Christian philosophers tried to argue that God, although a single being, fulfils different functions in creation, as suggested in various passages of the New Testament in rather elusive terms,<sup>134</sup> and they attempted to correlate these functions with the persons of the divine Trinity, especially with the Father and the Son. We have seen that Christian philosophers do this from the very beginning. Justin already had a theory about the divine *Logos*, God the Son, who functions as an intermediary between God the Father and the world. This theory gradually grows in complexity because Christian philosophers wished to distance themselves from the views of the Gnostics or Marcion, who distinguished sharply between a good, higher God, who has no contact with the created world, and an inferior creator God who is neither good nor skilled – the entity responsible for the creation of the world. Eventually this theory would lead to the doctrine of the Trinity agreed upon at the Council of Nicaea; it would become further refined in later councils. The development of this theory is very complex. I shall not go into all its intricacies here. I shall try, however, to give some sense of the debate that led to it and of the philosophical issues involved.

Let me begin by pointing out that a similar debate about the distinction between divine principles had also been going on among contemporary Platonists. The theory we find in Plotinus, according to which there are three such principles (the One, the Intellect, and the Soul), is the result of a long development that goes

back to Moderatus, Numenius, and Alcinous, and is based on a series of interpretations of Plato's works, especially the *Timaeus*, the *Republic*, and the *Parmenides*. Roughly speaking, this development was guided by the belief that the demiurge of the *Timaeus* cannot be identical with the Form of the Good in the *Republic*, first because he is constrained by necessity, that is, the receptacle, and also because he is not absolutely simple and unified, since he has thoughts. These reasons guided Platonists such as Numenius to postulate a God higher than the demiurge, whom they identified with the one of the *Parmenides* and the Form of the Good (frs. 16, 17, 19–21 Des Places). On similar grounds, Alcinous distinguishes between a first intellect that thinks only of itself, like Aristotle's God in *Metaphysics* XII (esp. 1074b29–35), and a second intellect, the demiurge, who thinks of the Forms (*Didask.* 164.19–31).

Similar concerns can also be observed behind the Christian justification of the distinction between God the Father, and his *Logos*, the Son. There are, however, also important differences between the pagan and the Christian debate. One is that, in the case of the Christians, God's Son became incarnate, appeared as a man and became actively involved in the world. This Christian doctrine was almost offensive to contemporary Platonists and Peripatetics, who considered God a purely intelligible entity – an intellect. Christians had to justify God's incarnation on the one hand and, on the other, they had even more reasons than their Platonist contemporaries to safeguard the transcendence of God the Father and to distinguish him from the sensible realm, the realm of God's incarnated *Logos* or Wisdom.

The crucial question, however, was how strong this distinction should be. If it is too strong, then God the Father is not the main principle of creation, and, if it is too weak, then God would not be sufficiently distanced from his product, the world, and the wickedness that occurs in it. Both tendencies are attested among early Christians. Marcion spoke of two different Gods, one good and one bad, while Praxeas, against whom Tertullian writes, denied any distinction between Father and Son and merged them into one identity (*Adv. Prax.* 2.3, 10). Similar was the later view of Sabellius (early third century) and Marcellus of Ancyra (c. 280–374), who held that Father and Son were identical and that it was the Father who appeared incarnate as the Son. However, neither identity nor a mere distinction in terms of existence would do. As we have seen, from very early on Christians spoke against the temporal priority of the Father, emphasizing the coexistence of Father and Son (*sympareinai*; Irenaeus, *Demonstr.* 58, SC 62: 158) and sought to establish a degree of unity such that both Father and Son would be of the same divine substance although remaining distinct in sequence, aspect, and manifestation (*Adv. Prax.* 2.4).

This, however, proved to be a very difficult task. Justin describes the *Logos* of God as another God (*heteros theos*; *Dial.* 62.2, 128.4, 129.1, 4) and as begotten (128.4), and he emphasizes their unity by using the image of the light of the sun (128.3):<sup>135</sup> in the same sense that the sunlight does not exist independently of the sun, the Son is not an entity independent of the Father. Justin calls the rays of the sun “powers” (*dynameis*; *Dial.* 121.2). Both this analogy and that of the image of

fire taken from fire, which Justin also uses (*Dial.* 128.4), aim to highlight the unity and the undiminishing status of God's substance. We find similar ideas in Tertullian and Theophilus. Tertullian sets out to argue against Praxeas, who maintained that the Father is essentially the Son and suffered on the cross as the Son did. Tertullian uses the analogy of the sun and its rays to illustrate the essential unity between God, the Son of God, and the Spirit, which is such, he claimed, that God is "one substance (*substantia*) in three persons (*personae*)".<sup>136</sup> Tertullian does not clarify the use of these terms, which are probably translations of the Greek terms *ousia* and *prosōpon*. Tertullian also claims that the Son is representative of the Father (*filius repraesentator patris*) in the sense that the Father is present in the Son.<sup>137</sup> The point here is that the divine substance is undiminished and a unity. This aspect of God is also illustrated by another analogy: the way we convey thought through language. In this case the knowledge of the one sharing a thought is not diminished through its transmission to a recipient. Both Justin (*Dial.* 61.2) and Theophilus (*Ad Autol.* II.22) use this analogy. Both of them, but Theophilus in particular, distinguish God the Father and his Son, the *Logos*, in terms of the originally Stoic distinction between *logos endiathetos*, a Stoic phrase used to signify rational thought, and *logos prophorikos*, rational speech.

The idea that the Son of God is identical with the expression of thought of God the Father was a way of conceptualizing the *Logos* that apparently stirred some discussion among early Christians. Clement adopted a slightly different conceptualization, namely that the Son is not the expression of the Father's thought but the very thought of the Father (*Strom.* IV.24.156.1).<sup>138</sup> The *Logos*/thought of God originates in God the Father, whom Clement presents as "the place of ideas" (*chōra ideōn*; IV.24.155.2) and he refers the reader to the *Phaedrus* (247c), where the supercelestial space is accessible only through the intellect. Clement argues that Son/the *Logos* is the principle and origin of beings (*archē kai aparchē tōn ontōn*; VII.1.2.3) and is the one who renders God the Father intelligible when the former becomes incarnated (*Strom.* V.16.5), while the Father remains transcendent and unintelligible (*Strom.* V.38.6, VII.1.2.3).<sup>139</sup> Origen also adopted that the Father–Son relation is analogous to that between knower and knowledge (*Princ.* I.8, IV.4.2–3). The problem with this idea, however, is that knowledge implies multiplicity and undermines the unity of both God the Father and God the Son. Clement sees the problem and claims that the Son is neither multiplicity nor unity, but a unity involving multiplicity (*hōs panta hen*; *Strom.* IV.24.156.2), whereas the Father is "simply one as one" (*Strom.* IV.24.156.2)<sup>140</sup>

This is a distinction inspired by the first two hypotheses of Plato's *Parmenides*.<sup>141</sup> It is this text which led Platonists equally to distinguish between two kinds of unity among the first and second God; the first God for Numenius and Alcinous and the One for Plotinus makes up a strong unity being absolutely simple, while the second God, the Intellect, is a multiplicity in unity, as it hosts the Forms.<sup>142</sup> This, I think, is precisely what leads Origen to distinguish between Father and Son in terms of a first and a second God (*C. Cels.* V.39), as contemporary Platonists did and also Philo before them (*Questions on Genesis* II.62). Like them, Origen

considers God the Father to be a cause greater than the Son or the Spirit, conforming to the Platonist principle that a cause that gives rise to a greater number of effects is greater than consequent causes.<sup>143</sup>

Origen, however, speaks as if the Son is the creation of God the Father (*In Joh.* I.19.111; *Princ.* IV.4.1); this is confirmed when he says that only God the Father is unbegotten (*Princ.* I.2.7). Origen does not mean temporal creation but only an eternal ontological dependence, because in his view also the Son has always existed (IV.4.1). Origen actually argues for the unity of God the Father and the Son in nature and substance (I.2.6); he argues that they relate as image (*imago*) to model (I.2.6; cf. Col. 1:15) or as light relates to its brightness (*Princ.* I.2.7). In his *Against Celsus* Origen tries to clarify the relation between God the Father and the Son, arguing that they are two *hypostaseis* but one in will (*boulēma*; *C. Cels.* VIII.12).<sup>144</sup> Origen is the first Christian to use the term *hypostasis* in this regard.<sup>145</sup>

What he means by this term has long been debated. It seems that in this context Origen uses the term as a synonym for *ousia*, substance. Origen's exact position on the status of the Son, however, remains an open question. He was someone who did not hesitate to express his puzzlement and point out the limits of human knowledge (see below, p. 95; Chapter 5, p. 169). It is interesting, however, to note that Origen uses the same conceptual apparatus to explain Christ's incarnation. Origen admits that this cannot be explained fully (*Princ.* II.6.2), but he nonetheless offers an explanation: God's wisdom was not confined as a whole in a human body but was present both in that body and everywhere else, since God's wisdom exists in all things, through all things, and above all things (*in omnibus, per omnia, super omnia*; *Princ.* IV.4.4). God's wisdom is described here as an image of God the Father that cannot exist separately from him (*Princ.* II.6.6, IV.4.3). Origen, however, insists – addressing those who identify the Father with the Son – that they are two *distinct hypostaseis* (*C. Cels.* VIII.12) despite being the same in substance (*ousia*; *In Joh.* II.23.149), and elsewhere he adds that the Spirit is a distinct hypostasis (*Fr. in Joh.* 37).<sup>146</sup>

The whole issue became a great deal more complex with the emergence of Arianism.<sup>147</sup> Arius (c. 260–336), a presbyter active in Alexandria, on the one hand maintained, like Origen, that the Son is subordinate to the Father and that he was also perhaps used by God the Father in the creation of the world. This means that he attributed a different causal role to each of the divine persons: the Father acts through the Son and the latter through the Spirit (Gregory, *Ad Abl.* 133B). Arius, however, differed from Origen in that he argued that Father and Son are different substances in the sense that only the Father is uncreated while the Son was, at some point, created by the Father (Athanasius, *C. Arianos* I.26.1). Arius famously argued that “there was when the Son was not”,<sup>148</sup> which means that the Son was, in his view, created in time. This is precisely what Origen never said.<sup>149</sup> For Arius God the Father was so different (*allogtrios*) from the Son, so that he is incomprehensible by the Son.<sup>150</sup> Arius may have been influenced by contemporary Platonist philosophy, which distinguishes kinds of divinities, including generated ones, as is the case in the *Timaeus*, for instance. He may have been influenced in particular

by the branch of Platonism which defended the view that the Forms are outside God, and he similarly maintained that the *Logos* was posterior and external to God the Father. But Arius may also have been led to such a view because of his wish to defend a stronger and more hierarchical monotheism than Origen.

The Arian view became increasingly popular, and its condemnation at the Council of Nicaea in 325 did not prevent it from spreading widely. In fact, this view acquired a new and more sophisticated articulation by the anomoeans, a group of Christians who were so named because they were committed to the view that the Son is unlike (*anomoios*) the Father in substance (Basil, *C. Eun.* 512b), specifically in the sense that the Father is uncreated while the Son is created (*C. Eun.* 517a, 520a). This view was championed by Eunomius, a contemporary of Basil and Gregory of Nyssa (Eunomius died sometime around 384). In a way the anomoeans took a further step by stressing the dissimilarity of the divine persons and not their similarity, as Arius did. This may be, after all, a difference in emphasis but not in substance, but it is noticeable nevertheless.

The reaction against Arian theology came in two main waves. The first was led by Athanasius, who was present at the Council of Nicaea and played a major role in the rejection of Arius' theological views. He was also concerned with opposing the views of Arius' sympathizers, such as Eusebius, who maintained that Father and Son share a similar (but not the same) substance (*homoiousios*). It was mainly the theory of Athanasius that was adopted at the Council of Nicaea in 325, when Athanasius was a young deacon, which he later elaborated in his writings.<sup>151</sup> The second wave of reactions against Arianism and its sympathizers came from the Cappadocians: Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa. Below I will briefly outline both theories.

Athanasius' main point against the Arians was that they theorized about God without seriously taking into account the incarnation of the Son of God, which Athanasius highlights, being the first to publish a treatise with such a title (*On the Incarnation of the Word*). Athanasius emphasizes that God brings the plan for man's salvation to completion through the incarnation of the Son. He argues, though, that the event of the incarnation does not mean that God the Father is essentially different from the Son. Athanasius insists on their essential identity. He claims that the two entities are of the same substance (*homoousios*) and that they are distinct only in the sense in which the intellect is to be distinguished from its thoughts or the sun from its light (*C. Arianos* I.25.1–6).<sup>152</sup>

Athanasius uses imagery that we find in Origen.<sup>153</sup> This was problematic for two reasons. First, Irenaeus criticized the imagery of emanation used by Gnostics, arguing that it is not right to conceive of the relation between God the Father and the Son in terms of the latter proceeding from the former, given the infinity, eternity, and omnipresence of the divine persons (*Adv. Haer.* II.13). And, at any rate, the use of such metaphors alone could not settle such a difficult issue. Second, later generations of Christians wanted to distance themselves from formulations reminiscent of Origen in order to avoid Platonist overtones and implications of the Son's subordination to the Father. The time was then ripe for a new and more sophisticated

conceptualization. This was offered by Basil and Gregory of Nyssa in their writings against Eunomius. Basil and Gregory defended Athanasius' view that God is one substance (*homoousios*), but he exists in three *hypostaseis* or divine persons: Father, Son, Spirit. But what kind of unity is there, if three persons are assumed?

Basil and Gregory of Nyssa distinguish between *ousia* and *hypostasis*, which were used interchangeably by earlier Christians.<sup>154</sup> They, like Athanasius, were heavily inspired by Origen in this regard.<sup>155</sup> Origen employed this distinction not only regarding God but also in order to distinguish individual humans (*hypostaseis*) who share the same essence or nature (i.e. humanity; *Princ.* III.1.22). We also find this distinction in Origen's contemporary, Plotinus; he distinguished between substance (*ousia*) and an entity depending on it, as in the case with fire (*substance*) and its heating effect (*hypostasis*; *Enn.* V.1.6.30–34). According to this distinction, *ousia* denotes that which is common and subsists of itself, and *hypostasis* denotes the particular or individual that exists in dependence on substance. Basil terms the latter *idion* or *idiōtēs* (Basil, *Letter* 38, Loeb vol. 1, 200). The following passages outline his view:

Since therefore reason has distinguished an element common (*koinon*) to the persons of the Holy Trinity as well as an element peculiar to each, what reason shows is common, is referred to the *ousia*, and the person (*hypostasis*) is the individualizing feature (*to idiazon sēmeion*) of each member of the Trinity.  
(Letter 38, Loeb, vol. 1, 215–217)<sup>156</sup>

The difference between *ousia* and *hypostasis* is the same as that between the common (*koinon*) and the particular (*idion*), as for instance between the living being and the particular man. For this reason in the case of the Godhead (*theotēs*) we confess one substance, so as not to give a variant definition of Its existence, but we confess a particular person (*hypostasin idiazousan*) so that our conception of Father, Son and Holy Spirit can be without confusion and clear

(Letter 236, Loeb, vol. 3, 400–402)

The above passages make clear that *ousia* is the common element that all *hypostaseis* share and that the *hypostasis* is the particular or the individual nature or person. Socrates, for instance, is a *hypostasis* of man, because he shares a certain *ousia* with all men, namely manhood; in the phrase “Socrates is a man”, “man” signifies the nature or the essence, which is one and indivisible, namely “humanity”, while Socrates is the individual, the *hypostasis*, that shares this *ousia* or nature. Socrates is both *ousia*, man, and a *hypostasis* of that *ousia*. The fact that there are many men does not mean that the nature of man exists in plurality or that it is divided; all men share the same account of substance or nature (*logos tēs ousias*), while they have different features (*idiomata*) that make them different individuals, *hypostaseis* (Gregory, *C. Eun.* I.227, GNO 93.8–10).<sup>157</sup>

Let me give another example of a common substance and participating individuals. When we speak of the police we mean a certain substance. But within this

substance there are individual members, the officers. A certain policeman is such an individual member of the substance “police”. He exists as a policeman insofar as he is an individual member of the police. The substance “police” on the other hand exists to the extent that police officers exist. It is not the case that each of them is only part of the police; rather, each one of them is “the police”. If a policeman stops us on the highway, we say that we were stopped by the police, not by *X* or even by policeman *X*. In fact, we stop because we recognize “the police” in the policeman. In other words, we take each of the police officers to be a *hypostasis* of the substance “police”. The *hypostasis* “policeman” cannot exist without the substance “police”, while the latter exists only through the *hypostaseis*, the individual police officers. An individual policeman is, then, both an *ousia* (police) and a *hypostasis* (this particular policeman, e.g. George).

The above example is inspired by Gregory, who uses similar examples of collective substances such as “church”, “folk”, which exist through many individuals (*Ad Abl.* 120B).<sup>158</sup> Apparently Gregory’s addressee, Ablabius, used such examples. The problem with some of these examples, however, is that one may be a *hypostasis* of the church without being the church, as is the case with the police example, in which individuals represent the collective substance. Examples do not have to be limited to collective nouns, however. Any noun can denote both a substance and an individual. We see that in the case of substances such as gold, of which we speak in the singular (*chrysos*), even when there are many golden objects (*chryseoi*):<sup>159</sup> “As there are many golden staters but gold is one, there are also many who manifest themselves individually in the nature of man, like, for instance, Peter, and Jacob, and Johannes, yet there is one man in them” (*Ad Abl.* 132B; cf. *C. Eun.* III.34, GNO 63.7–12). The point here is that both gold and man are indefinite names of natures, and the name “divine” or “God” (*theos*) is similar; it signifies a nature or a substance. In the case of God, the idea is that God is one substance existing in three *hypostaseis*, Father, Son, and the Spirit, in the same sense that gold exists in individual golden objects and humanity in individual men. The fact that each one of these *hypostaseis* is “God” does not mean that there are three Gods because the substance or nature is one in the same sense in which three men do not make three “manhoods”, three policemen do not make three “polices”, and three golden coins do not make three “golds”.

The unity of the divine substance is also to be accounted for in terms of a common activity (*energeia*). Indeed, Gregory suggests, God reveals himself through his activity. Yet God (the divine substance) acts in a unified way, which represents the united divine will (*thelēma*; *Ad Abl.* 128A), and through this activity is revealed to us (*C. Eun.* I.87.25 GNO). This is a point already made by Origen, but now Gregory elaborates on that further. Unlike human agents, he suggests, divine persons do not collaborate in a joint action; rather, they make up one agent and their activity is one, that is, intentionally one. All of them bring about the divine plan and their differences are differences between divine *hypostaseis*.<sup>160</sup>

We find a similar theory in Porphyry.<sup>161</sup> He distinguishes between two aspects of the highest entity in the intelligible realm, the One, namely between an utterly

transcendent aspect and an aspect which is the source of all being, each of which corresponds to the subject of the first two hypotheses of Plato's *Parmenides*. The latter participates of being and generates existence, life, and intelligence. Porphyry speaks of it as a triad comprising Father, Life, and Intellect, which is nonetheless a unity. The Father in this case is both the primal God and the principle of unity of the triad that generates. The triad itself makes up a unity, that is, one substance, which expresses the creative aspect of the One. We have some evidence that Basil and Gregory were familiar with Porphyry's relevant views (frs. 364a, b Smith), and they may well have drawn on it, as they did on the issue of matter and of cosmogony.

Of course, the Cappadocian theory, despite its sophistication, did not solve all the problems, and it definitely did not eliminate divergent views. It did not engage with the question, for instance, of why there have to be three *hypostaseis* rather than four or five. And it did not prevent Eunomius from taking up Arius' view and defending it with zeal until the end of his life. As is the case with all interesting philosophical theories, however, this one stirred up further debate and controversy. We need to remember, though, that this theory had a rather modest ambition, which was to counter the Arian/anomoean view of the Christian God. Its proponents admitted that God's substance remains a mystery which the human mind cannot penetrate and human language cannot describe.

Gregory in particular stresses that God cannot be entirely described in positive terms, but rather in negative terms, because God is essentially infinite. Given God's infinity, we have a limited understanding of God and our quest for him is bound to be endless. Thus only when we speak of God in negative terms we do justice to God's infinity and incomprehensibility.<sup>162</sup> This is a view held by earlier Christians, such as Justin (*Dial.* 3–4), Theophilus (*Tō Autolykus* I.3), Clement (*Strom.* V.12.83.4), Tertullian (*Apol.* 17), and Origen (*Princ.* II.7, *C. Cels.* VI.4), but it started earlier, in the works of Philo, who was arguably the first to describe God as ineffable (*arrētos*).<sup>163</sup> So speak pagan philosophers such as Alcinoüs, being inspired especially by Plato's *Phaedrus* 246E–247C.<sup>164</sup> This tendency of Platonists becomes more pronounced with Plotinus, who famously identified the One of the *Parmenides* with the Form of the Good in *Republic* VI, which is described as “beyond being” (*Rep.* 509B) and he repeatedly pointed to the ineffability of the One, the highest principle (*Enn.* V.3.14.1–8, VI.9.5.31–32). Early Christians speak similarly: relying on Matthew 11:27, Christians like Clement claimed that the Father can only be known through the Son, being himself beyond intelligibility (*hyperanō noēsēōs*; *Strom.* V.11.71.1–5). The Christian point, however, is different from that of the pagan contemporaries; they want to suggest that God reveals himself only indirectly and partly even at the moment of revelation, and this serves a purpose – namely, that we need to get to know God though faith.

This tradition of declaring God as ineffable and knowable only in negative terms would be developed further by Hellenic and Christian philosophers alike (Proclus, Damascius, pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite). It is interesting that both pagans and Christians work hard on specifying the highest principles of reality and



explaining the realm of the divine while at the same time acknowledge that this realm can only partly and incompletely been known. This is particularly intriguing in the case of Christians such as the Cappadocians, who on the one hand engage in intense Christological debates, arguing about the nature of God, and on the other hand capitalize on God's infinity, insisting that God is ineffable and incomprehensible. But both pagans and Christians are similar in this regard, namely exhibiting a spirit of enquiry in the divine realm and at the same time acknowledging the ineffability of the divine.

## Notes

- 1 ἡ οὐσία ἀρχὴ καὶ αἰτία τις ἐστὶν (substance is a certain principle and cause; *Met.* 1041a9–10).
- 2 τὸ εἶναι καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν ὑπ' ἐκείνου αὐτοῖς προσεῖναι (being and substance is given to them by that [the Form of the Good]; *Rep.* 509b7–8).
- 3 On the role of necessity in creation, see Cornford (1937: 59–77) and Johansen (2004: 94–97). One central role of necessity is to give rise to the four elements as a result of the resemblances of Forms entering the receptacle.
- 4 The material elements are structured according to mathematical principles and they amount to configurations of geometrical shapes, as is made clear in *Timaeus* 53d–55c.
- 5 See Origen, *Princ.* II.3.6, *C. Cels.* VI.49, *In Gen.* 3; cf. Philo, *De aet. mundi* 3.
- 6 Alexander speaks of the “order that pertains to earth” (τῷ περὶ τὴν γῆν κόσμῳ; *In Meteorologica* 43.28–29).
- 7 For example, Anaxagoras DK 59 A43, A12; Aristotle, *E.E.* 1216a11. The term used for “heaven”, *ouranos*, likewise has a narrow and a wide sense. It can refer to the celestial realm alone or to the universe as a whole (thus in *Tim.* 28b2–3, 31a2–b3, 32b7, *Met.* 990a22). Aristotle distinguishes three senses of this term in *De caelo* (278b9–21), the first two applying to the celestial realm in different senses and the third to “the entire universe”. This ambiguity caused disagreement about the subject matter of *De caelo* among ancient interpreters. The Stoics use the term *ouranos* as an equivalent for the entire universe (*holos o kosmos*; Cornutus, *Greek Theology* 17.5). Cf. Alexander, *In Meteorologica* 41.20. Basil distinguishes between *ouranos*, the celestial realm, and *kosmos*, the universe (*Hex.* 3.3, 56D).
- 8 *Tim.* 27a5–6, 30b1, 28b2–3; Posidonius (Diogenes Laertius, 7.138), Philo, *De aet. mundi* 4, ps.-Aristotle, *De mundo* 391b9–10. The author of *De mundo* gives two definitions of *kosmos*, one immediately following the other, as “an organized whole (*systema*) of heaven and earth and the natural bodies that they contain” and “as an arrangement and order of the wholes preserved by God and for the sake of God” (391b10–12). See the commentary of Thein (2020: 62–65). See also Alexander, *In Meteorologica* 6.32–33 and the following note.
- 9 The Stoics come close to that in their definition of the *kosmos* as σύστημα ἐκ θεῶν καὶ ἀνθρώπων καὶ τῶν ἕνεκα τούτων γεγυγνόντων (an organized whole consisting of gods and humans and everything existing for their sake). Posidonius (D.L. 7.138); cf. Chrysippus in Stobaeus, *Ecl.* I.184.8 (*SVF* II.527; cf. *SVF* II.529).
- 10 *In Johannen* 1.19, *C. Cels.* V.39. On the structure of *De principiis*, see Kübel (1971). In a way, its structure is the opposite of that imposed by Porphyry in Plotinus *Enneads* (descending versus ascending perspective).
- 11 See Plato, *Phaed.* 97c4; *Philebus* 30c5; *Tim.* 53b1.
- 12 The rational structure of the world is manifested also in the primary elements (earth, air, fire, and water), which are crafted in the receptacle (53c–55c) and have a mathematical structure.
- 13 This was the case of Atticus (fr. 12 Des Places) and of Longinus (in Proclus, *In Tim.* I.322.18–26).

- 14 Moderatus (in Simplicius, *In Phys.* 230.34–231.24), Numenius (frs. 11, 16 Des Places), and Plotinus (e.g. *Enn.* III.9.1, VI.7.14–15) fall into this category.
- 15 See Speusippus in Iamblichus, *De communi mathematica scientia* 15.6–17, 16.15–17.28 Festa; Aristotle, *Met.* 1091b30–35 (frs. 72, 88, 64 Isnardi-Parente), Xenocrates in Aetius I.3.21, I.7.30 and in Plutarch, *De an. procr.* 1012D–1013B (frs. 101, 213, 188 Isnardi-Parente). See Dillon (2003).
- 16 I refer to Antiochus, as reported in Cicero, *Acad.* II.24–29. We find the same two-tier scheme of principles in Diogenes Laertius III.69 and in the Peripatetic Aristocles in Eusebius, *PE.* 15.14.1.
- 17 Sedley (2002) has argued that Antiochus' theory of an active and a passive principle reflects that of Polemo, fourth scholarch of the Academy.
- 18 On this topic, see Runia (1968).
- 19 An illuminating report is the following: "They [sc. Marcionites] postulate three principles, the good, the just, and matter: though some of their adherents make four, good, just, evil, matter. They all agree that God never made anything: but the Just – or some say, the Evil – made the universe out of pre-existent matter. He made it not well, but irrationally: for of necessity things made have to be like their maker. They quote to this effect the Gospel parable, that a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit" (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I.10.19). Evans (1972: xii) claims that the report is too negative to be true. Yet some of the views in this report were shared by other Christians as well.
- 20 On Valentinus' cosmology, see Quispel (1996: 349–351), Williams (1996: 14–18), Thomassen (2006).
- 21 The dating of the *De mundo* remains controversial. The view of Reale and Bos (1995) that this is a genuine Aristotelian work is implausible. Moraux (1984: 6–7, 77) has suggested a date near the time of Philo. A date in the first to second centuries CE is more likely in my view. See Gregoric-Karamanolis (2020: 4–9).
- 22 See also below, n. 42.
- 23 This was already pointed out in the Old Testament, Wisdom of Solomon 13:5. See further Tertullian, *Res.* 2.8, *Adv. Marc.* I.10.1–4, II.3.2, V.16, Athanasius, *C. Gentes* 44–45.
- 24 This tendency begins in the New Testament (Acts 17, Rom. 1:7).
- 25 See further Johansen (2014), who shows that in the *Timaeus* only a craftsman can cause a result as beautiful as the *kosmos*. Cf. Sedley (2007), 93–132.
- 26 This is how Aristotle refers to the receptacle in *Phys.* 191b35–192a25 and *De gen. et corr.* 329b14–25, but it may well be that this view goes back to the early Academy.
- 27 On Numenius' views on matter, see Karamanolis (2013a) and especially Jourdan (2014).
- 28 As in the case of Alcinoüs in his *Didaskalikos* 163.11–14; Apuleius, *De Platone et eius dogmate* I.5.190.
- 29 See *Enn.* I.8. At *Enn.* I.8.14.51 Plotinus does claim, though, that the soul generated matter. The whole issue of the status of matter in Plotinus is controversial. See Rist (1961: 154–166) and O'Brien (1991).
- 30 *De an. procr.* 1014BD; Numenius fr. 52 Des Places.
- 31 Proclus, *On the Existence of Evils* 7.16–50. For a commentary, see Phillips (2007).
- 32 The Christians do so from very early on. See Rom. 1:20, Marc. 10:6, 13:19. See Gregory *Apol.* 28E and the pervasive use of this terminology in Athanasius' work, in *Contra Gentes*, for instance.
- 33 The Platonist Taurus (second century CE) lists the possible senses of *genētos* (in Philoponus, *De aet. mundi* 146.8–147.9). The term was first employed by Aristotle in his discussion of the *Timaeus* (*De caelo* 279b5). See Karamanolis (2006: 30–31, 181–184).
- 34 The world is considered to be god in *Timaeus* 34b1, 55d5, 69e3–4; Aristotle, *On Philosophy*, fr. 26 Ross (=Cicero, *De nat. deor.* I.33); Chrysippus, *SVF* II.227; Plotinus, *Enn.* IV.8.1.41–2.
- 35 On Philo's interpretation of cosmogony, see Runia (2003: esp. 136–139).
- 36 Cf. I Cor. 11:23, 15:1. Similar vocabulary occurs throughout 1 *Apol.* (e.g. 14.4, 46.1); cf. 2 *Apol.* 4.2.

- 37 Philo also uses the term *tropē* for the imposition of order in matter in *De opif.* 21.
- 38 On this, see May (1978: 124–125).
- 39 This view has been defended against May (1978) by Osborn (1973: 46–48; 2001: 66–67), and Runia (2003).
- 40 1 *Apol.* 14.4; 2 *Apol.* 10.3–8; cf. 1 *Apol.* 23.1, 32.10, 33.6; 2 *Apol.* 6.3.
- 41 Andersen (1952–1953: 188–191).
- 42 καὶ τὸν ὅλον οὐρανὸν διεκόσμησε μία ἢ διὰ πάντων διήκουσα δύναμις (and the whole heaven have been set in order by the single power which interpenetrates all things. *De mundo* 396b28–30); cf. σωτὴρ μὲν ὄντως ἀπάντων ἐστὶ καὶ γενέτωρ τῶν ὀπωσθήποτε κατὰ τόνδε τὸν κόσμον συντελουμένων ὁ θεὸς, οὐ μὴν αὐτουργοῦ καὶ ἐπιπόνου ζῶου κάρματος ὑπομένων, ἀλλὰ δυνάμει χρώμενος ἀρτύτω (for God is indeed the preserver of all things and the creator of everything in this *kosmos*, however it is brought to fruition; but he does not take upon himself the toil of a creature that works and labours for itself but uses an indefatigable power (397b22–24, trans. Furley). Cf. Philo, *De confusione linguae* 137; *De posteritate Caini* 19–20. I am grateful to Matyas Havrda for the last two references.
- 43 Numenius fr. 11 Des Places. See Karamanolis (2013a). Grant (1988) has argued that Justin may have been acquainted with Numenius, which is not impossible but remains uncertain.
- 44 On this issue, see further May (1978: 131–132).
- 45 This is announced in the title of Athenagoras' work. The addressees are the emperor Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus. This sets the date of Athenagoras' treatise between 176 and 180.
- 46 ἐν ιδέα καὶ ἐνεργείᾳ (*Legatio* 10.3). See further Rankin (2010: 419–424).
- 47 On this objection, see Sorabji (1993: 232–252).
- 48 This was suggested already by Speusippus (frs. 61a–b Taràn) and Xenocrates (fr. 54 Heinze). See Sorabji (1993: 268–271).
- 49 On Plutarch's interpretation of the *Timaeus*, see Karamanolis (2013b).
- 50 This view occurs also in Apuleius, *De Platone* I.5.190. See further Pépin (1964: 17–58).
- 51 See Runia (2003: 142).
- 52 This is how the verb is used in Clement, *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 7, 39, 47; Justin, *Dial.* 61; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I.7.2; see Lampe *s.v.*
- 53 Justin uses the same verb for the *Logos* (*Dial.* 128.3).
- 54 See Dörrie (1976a).
- 55 See Justin, 1 *Apol.* 26.5; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I.27.2; Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* I.6.1, III.3.23.
- 56 This is implied in the expression *extremitatis fructum*, which is a translation of the Greek ὑστερήματος καρπός, a Gnostic expression (ὑστερήμα means “deficiency” here; cf. Luke 21.4; *Corpus Hermeticum* 13.1). According to the Gnostic view (perhaps of Valentinus), there is, above the demiurge, the *Pleroma*, which contains everything. See Doutreleau and Rousseau (1982: vol. II.1, 201–202).
- 57 *Si non et bonus sit, non est Deus, quia Deus non est cui bonitas desit* (*Adv. Haer.* III.25.3).
- 58 See Osborn (2001: 62–64).
- 59 *Timaeus* 27d–29b and the analysis of Johansen (2004: 69–90).
- 60 *Facere enim proprium est benignitatis Dei*; cf. *Adv. Haer.* IV.7.4, V.29.1.
- 61 Cf. *Tim.* 29e; *Laws* 715e–716a. For a further discussion of this point, see Steenberg (2008: 32–33).
- 62 See Seneca, *Epist.* 66.12: “*si ratio divina est, nullum autem bonum sine ratione est, bonum omnne divinum est*”. See also Osborn (1997: 95–96).
- 63 See Steenberg (2008: 6–7, 145–150), who rightly stresses Irenaeus' anthropocentric view of creation.
- 64 On God's salvation plan which exhibits God's love for the humankind, see also Chapter 6.
- 65 See May (1978: 168).
- 66 For a discussion of this point, see Briggman (2011: 119–123).
- 67 On this, see Osborn (2001: 51–53), with further biblical references, and Steenberg (2008: 62–71).

- 68 See the discussion in Steenberg (2008: 64–66).
- 69 *Opsea semetipso substantiam creaturarum et exemplum factorum et figuram in mundo ornamentorum accipiens*. Cf. *Tim.* 28c (God is the father of the world).
- 70 See further May (1978: 173–176).
- 71 *Adv. Haer.* II.2.4, II.30.9, IV.20.1–2. See further Runia (2003: 133–151).
- 72 On the impact of Xenophanes' conception of God on Irenaeus, see Osborn (2001: 32–38). For an explicit appeal to Xenophanes' notion of God, see Clement, *Strom.* VII.4.22.1.
- 73 Tertullian's polemic against Marcion is well outlined by Meijering (1977) and Osborn (1997: ch. 5).
- 74 What we know about Hermogenes comes only from Tertullian's treatise. Two other works critical of his views – by Theophilus (Eusebius, *H.E.* IV.24.1) and Tertullian's work against Hermogenes on the soul – are no longer extant. See Waszink (1947: 7–9) and below, Chapter 5, pp. 176–178.
- 75 *Indem sumpsit a Stoicis materiam cum domino ponere* (*Adv. Herm.* I.4). Interestingly, both E. Kroymann in his edition *Tertullianus: De Resurrectione Mortuorum* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1906) (CSEL 47) and Waszink (1955: 129–147) believe that the phrase *a Stoicis* here must be glossed on the grounds that it was from Plato's school, the Academy, that Hermogenes took over the doctrine of pre-existent matter. But even if Hermogenes was closer to having a Platonist profile, as Hippolytus (*Ref.* VIII.17.2) suggests, this does not mean that Tertullian considered him as such. Tertullian repeats his claim of Hermogenes' debt to Stoicism later in his work (*Adv. Herm.* 44.1). See pp. 73–74.
- 76 For a discussion of Hermogenes' position see May (1978: 143–145).
- 77 Tertullian appears to consider the property of being the creator a necessary divine attribute (*Adv. Marc.* I.12.1–2, 13.3).
- 78 He maintains this throughout his *Adv. Marc.* and elsewhere – for example, in *Res.* 11.6.
- 79 “Reason without goodness is not reason and goodness without reason is not goodness, unless perhaps in Marcion's God, whom, as I have shown, is irrationally good” (*Adv. Marc.* II.6.2).
- 80 See, e.g., Clement, *Strom.* VII.7.48.1–2; Lactantius, *De ira Dei* 13.1 and throughout his *De opificio Dei*; Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 1.12; Gregory, *De an.* 124CD GNO 94.8–15 (cited below). See further Chapters 4 and 6.
- 81 Alcinous, *Didask.* 163.3–8; Apuleius, *De Platone* I.5.192; cf. Arius Didymus in *Dox. Gr.* 448 Diels.
- 82 In Tertullian's time there was a close relationship between Platonism and Stoicism. Porphyry tells us about a certain Trypho, contemporary of Plotinus, who was both Platonist and Stoic (*VP.* 17.3). Cf. *VP.* 14.4–5.
- 83 See Lilla (1971: 189–191).
- 84 For similar descriptions of the relation between the intelligible and sensible realms, see Plutarch, *De an. procr.* 1013C; *De Iside* 373A; Alcinous, *Didask.* 167.5–11; Apuleius, *De Platone* I.5–9.192–199.
- 85 *Sine ulla specie atque carentem omni illa qualitate* (with no form and lacking every quality; Cicero, *Acad.* II.27D). Sedley (2002: 41–83) ascribes this view of Antiochus back to Polemo.
- 86 Alcinous calls the receptacle, i.e. matter, ἀποιόν . . . καὶ ἀνείδεον (*Didask.* 163.6). In *Timaeus* it is called ἄμορφος (50d7, 51a7); the term ἀποιόν is used by the Stoics (*SVF* I.85, II.111). On this, see Dillon (2002: 91).
- 87 See further Runia (2003) and Osborn (2011: 32 n. 4).
- 88 See Lilla (1971: 193–194) and Osborne (2011: 278). Lilla suggests that Clement's acceptance of the view that matter is a non-being lends support to the idea that he also accepts pre-existing matter. But this is not necessary. Plotinus endorses a similar view, but plainly he does not consider matter to be a principle.
- 89 ψιλῶ τῷ βούλεσθαι δημιουργεῖ καὶ τῷ μόνον ἐθελῆσαι αὐτὸν ἔπεται τὸ γεγενησθαι ([God] creates only through his will and through his wish alone follows the coming about; *Protr.* 63.3).

- 90 *Thelēma* describes both the *Logos*, through which God creates (*Strom.* II.16.75.2, V. 1.6.3), and the created world (*Paed.* I.27.2). See Le Boulluec (1981: vol. II, 43–44).
- 91 On the status of *Logos* in Clement, see Edwards (2000: 159–177).
- 92 See further Le Boulluec (1981: vol. II, 84–88).
- 93 On Origen's cosmology, see Tzamalikos (2006) and Boys-Stones (2001: 319–337).
- 94 This was already realized by Irenaeus (e.g. *Adv. Haer.* IV.37–38), and also Clement (e.g. *Strom.* VI.9.96.1–2).
- 95 Origen sides with the conception of *kosmos* found in Stoicism (D.L. 7.138, *SVF* II.527) and in *De mundo* 391b9–10.
- 96 Origen uses the term ἀναίτιως.
- 97 More on this in Chapter 4. On the Stoic notion of cause see further Frede (1987b).
- 98 See Alexander, *On the Soul* 36.27–37.3; Plotinus, *Enn.* VI.7.7.6–8; Porphyry, *Tō Gaurus on How the Human Embryos are Ensouled*, XI.3.49.9. On this notion, see Aubry (2008).
- 99 τοὺς σπερματικοὺς λόγους τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ ὕλη παραδεξαμένη ἔχει ἐν ἑαυτῇ εἰς κατακόσμησιν τῶν ὄλων (*C. Cels.* IV.48; *SVF* 2.1074).
- 100 Rufinus' translation, to the extent we can judge, is generally faithful to the original Greek.
- 101 *Materiam ergo intellegimus quae subiecta est corporibus, id est ex qua inditis atque insertis qualitibus corpora subsistunt* (*Princ.* II.1.4).
- 102 *In Joh.* I.19.114; *Princ.* I.2.2; *C. Cels.* V.37. Tzamalikos (2006: 61) argues that these “reasons” are different from the Platonic Ideas in that they have no being of their own, that is, they do not subsist. But many of Origen's Platonist contemporaries conceived of the Forms as dependent on God – for example, Alcinous (*Didask.* 163a30–35) and Plotinus (*Enn.* III.2.1.24–34, III.8.8.40–45), who must have relied on Aristotle (*Met.* XII, 1072b20–21).
- 103 τοὺς τύπους τοῦ συστήματος τοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ νοημάτων (*In Joh.* I.19.113).
- 104 δημιουργός δὲ ὁ Χριστὸς ὡς ἀρχή, καθ' ὃ σοφία ἐστὶ, τῷ σοφία εἶναι καλούμενος ἀρχή (Christ is creator, being a principle to the extent that he is wisdom; he is called “principle” since he is wisdom; *In Joh.* I.19.111). On this passage, see Tzamalikos (2006: 84–85, 165–172).
- 105 Origen gives the standard example of such a relation between coeternal beings: light as the cause of brightness (*Princ.* I.2.4); cf. Plotinus, *Enn.* V.4.2.27–30, Porphyry fr. 261 Smith.
- 106 Numenius fr. 16 Des Places; Alcinous, *Didask.* 164.31–33; cf. Plotinus, *Enn.* I.2.6.23–26.
- 107 Origen was familiar with the work of Numenius (cf. *C. Cels.* I.15, IV.51, V.38), and Clement probably was as well, as *Strom.* I.22.150.4 suggests. Eusebius, our source of many Numenius' fragments, knew Numenius very well because Numenius had been appreciated by his Christian predecessors. See Saffrey (1975). It is also possible that Origen had knowledge of Alcinous' *Didaskalikos*. See Waszink (1965: 155–158) and Droge (1989: 146–149).
- 108 Origen follows a metaphysical principle that we first find articulated in Iamblichus and then elaborated in Proclus: a cause operates down to the lowest level irrespective of the point at which it begins (Iamblichus in Olympiodorus, *Ad Alcibiadem* I.115A; Proclus, *Elements of Theology* 56). This point is convincingly argued by Dillon (1982).
- 109 For a comment, see Dillon (1996a: 263).
- 110 ἀπὸ τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ τύπων τοῖς οὐσίαις καὶ τῇ ὕλῃ παρασχεῖν καὶ τὴν πλάσιν καὶ τὰ εἶδη, ἐγὼ δὲ ἐφίστημι εἰ καὶ τὰς οὐσίας (out of the traces hosted in it [i.e. God's Wisdom] she brings about to the world and the Forms in beings and in matter, and, I assume, the substances too; *In Joh.* I.19.115). Cf. *C. Cels.* IV.48 cited above in n. 99.
- 111 See further Origen, *Homily on Leviticus* XIII.4; *Princ.* IV.3.8 and Chapter 5, pp. 181–185.
- 112 On Basil's interpretation of cosmogony, see mainly Köckert (2009: 312–399).
- 113 *Hex.* 2.2. See also Plotinus, *Enn.* II.4.16.3, I.8.5.23, I.8.911–914.
- 114 Basil attributes this view to his adversaries (“I use their own words”; *Hex.* 2.2), and it is not at all clear that he endorses it. See further Köckert (2009: 352–353) – she fails to capture Basil's dialectical point, however.

- 115 This view prevails from Taurus onwards (in Philoponus, *De aet. mundi* 147.15–25) and is defended by Plotinus, *Enn.* III.2.2 and Porphyry (in Proclus, *In Tim.* I.392.17–25; in Philoponus, *De aet. mundi* 172.11–15).
- 116 See above, n. 105. The sun analogy is similarly used in Sallustius, *On Gods and the World*, 7, 9. See further Köckert (2009: 335–338).
- 117 This is what Porphyry claims when he says: τῷ εἶναι τὸν θεῖον νοῦν ἐπιμελούμενον . . . τῷ παρεῖναι μόνον ἐνεργῆσαν (in Proclus, *In Tim.* I.395.11–13).
- 118 Philo, *On the Migration of Abraham* 32, 178–180, Plotinus, *Enn.* IV.4.40.1.
- 119 See Köckert (2009: 346) and Zachhuber (2006).
- 120 On this distinction in Plotinus, see Karamanolis (2009). Cf. Porphyry, *In Cat.* 95.22–33.
- 121 τὸ οἰοεῖ χαρακτηριστικὸν τῆς φύσεως τοῦ ὑποκειμένου (*Hex.* 4.5).
- 122 Basil uses the term *hypokeimenon* in the sense of (a) substratum, which he rejects, and in the sense (b) bearer of qualities, which he approves. Sense (b) is more a way of speaking than a metaphysically loaded sense, to which Basil resorts in order to speak of the possibility of abstraction which exists only in theory (*epinoiai*).
- 123 Porphyry, *De cultu simulacrorum* fr. 354.43–51 Smith, in Proclus, *In Tim.* I.393.10–32, I.395.9–21.
- 124 οὐ γάρ τι τούτων ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ ὕλη ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ συνδραμόντα πρὸς ἀλλήλα ὕλη γίνεται (*Apol.* 69C).
- 125 We know that the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body was criticized by pagans. See Origen, *C. Cels.* II.16, V.14. Porphyry must have made a similar criticism in his *Against Christians*, of which we have limited and disputable evidence, fr. 35 Harnack. See further Chapter 5, “The status of the human body” (pp. 193–196).
- 126 Thus von Balthasar and Armogathe (1988: 1–80).
- 127 This has been appreciated by Sorabji (1993: 292–293).
- 128 This view goes back to Moderatus (in Simplicius, *In Phys.* 230.5–27).
- 129 Porphyry, *De cultu simulacrorum*, in Eusebius, *P.E.* III.9.3; fr. 345, 43–51 Smith (λόγοις σπερματικοῖς ἀπετέλει τὰ πάντα [sc. Zeus]; Proclus, *In Tim.* I.392.2–4).
- 130 See the texts in the footnote above and the discussion in Karamanolis (2006: 277–284).
- 131 Sorabji (1993: 293) sees the two philosophers at variance here despite their use of similar imagery.
- 132 Gregory uses both the adjective ἀθρόος, construed, for instance, with σύστασις τῶν ὄντων, and the adverb ἀθρόως (*Apology for Hex.* 72AB, 72C–73A, 77CD) and he takes that to be a synonym of the biblical “*en archē*”, meaning “suddenness”. Porphyry uses the term similarly in Proclus, *In Tim.* I.395.21. Plotinus uses the term ἀθρόως when thinking along similar lines (*Enn.* II.9.12.16). For a recent discussion of Gregory’s theory see now Van Riel–Wauters (2020).
- 133 See G. Berkeley (1998: third dialogue). Sorabji (1993: 293–294) first noticed this. Hibbs (2005) criticizes Sorabji’s view.
- 134 Matthew 11:27; John 1:18, 7:29, 8:18–19, 10:25, 10:30 (I and the Father are one), 17:5–11, 17:22–23.
- 135 On Justin’s theory of the Son/Logos–Father relation, see Goodenough (1923: 148–153) and Edwards (1995).
- 136 See *Apol.* 21.11–13 and *Adv. Prax.* 3, 8. For a discussion of these passages, see Evans (1948: 50–63).
- 137 *Igitur et manifestam fecit duarum personarum coniunctionem, ne pater seorsum quasi visibilis in conspectu desideraretur et ut filius representator patris haberetur* (Therefore he also made manifest the conjunction of the two Persons, so that the Father separately might not, as though visible, be asked for an open view, and that the Son might be accepted as he who makes the Father present; *Adv. Prax.* 24.8, Evans transl.). Tertullian relies on John 14:9, 11, 2 Cor. 4.
- 138 This relies on Matthew 11:27: “no one knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone know the Father except the Son”.
- 139 See Havrda (2020). When Clement claims in *Strom.* VIII.I.2.3 that the Father is the cause beyond (τὸ ἐπέκεινα αἰτίου), he may well allude to the description of the Form of the Good in *Republic* 509b.

- 140 On Clement's notion of *Logos*, see Edwards (2000).
- 141 Lilla (1971: 205–206).
- 142 This is suggested in *Parmenides* 142d2. Plotinus in *Enn.* V.1.8.23–27 refers explicitly to *Parmenides*, distinguishing a One, a One-Many, and a One and Many (i.e. One, Intellect, Soul). See Origen, *Princ.* III.5.6, where the Son is said to be the word and wisdom of the Father.
- 143 See Dillon (1982) with reference to Origen's *Princ.* I.3.5.
- 144 ὄντα δύο τῆ ὑποστάσει πράγματα, ἐν δὲ τῆ ὁμοιοῖα καὶ τῆ συμφωνία καὶ τῆ ταυτότητι τοῦ βουλήματος (while they [God the Father and the Son] are two entities in being, they are one in having their will harmonious, agreed and identical). Cf. *In Joh.* II.75; *Princ.* I.2.12. Origen relies on John 4:34, 5:30, 6:38.
- 145 See Hammerstaedt (1991, and, for a fuller explanation, 1994), and especially Ramelli (2012b). Origen also uses the term in other senses, namely “substance”, “existence”.
- 146 See further Ramelli (2012b), who has meticulously collected and discussed the relevant evidence.
- 147 On Arius' views, see Stead (1963) and Kannengiesser (1983). On the controversy that Arius created, see Simonetti (1975).
- 148 Arius, *Letter to Alexander Bishop of Alexandria*, in Epiphanius, *Adversus Haereses* 69.7; Stevenson (1987: 326–327).
- 149 Origen's divergence from the Arian position is well established by Ramelli (2011, 2012b).
- 150 Athanasius, *De decretis Niceane synodi* 6.1.4–5.
- 151 On the intellectual background of the Council of Nicaea, see Ayres (2004).
- 152 See further Anatolios (1998: esp. 85–163), and Ramelli (2012b), who stresses that Athanasius draws heavily on Origen in this regard.
- 153 See Meijering (1968), who stresses the Platonist conceptual tools of Athanasius and his debt to Origen.
- 154 Clement, for instance, uses the two terms interchangeably (*Strom.* IV.136.4–5, V.3.2). I am indebted to Ramelli (2012b: 345–346) for the references.
- 155 There is a great deal of literature on the *ousia/hypostasis* distinction and its background. See Hammerstaedt (1994); Frede (1997a: 38–54, esp. 42–50); Zachhuber (1999: 70–92); Turcescu (2005); Ramelli (2012b). Important are Basil's *Letter* 38 and Gregory's short work addressed to Ablabius, *On Not Three Gods*. The authenticity of Basil's letter is disputed, since the same work is transmitted among Gregory's works. See Zachhuber (2003); Turcescu (2005: 63–66).
- 156 Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *C. Eun.* 1.278–281, GNO 107.23–109.14.
- 157 The logical and metaphysical background of this distinctions is still debated; see Edwards (2019: 99–128).
- 158 On Gregory's argument in *Ad Ablabium*, see Radde-Gallwitz (2018b).
- 159 On this point, see Zachhuber (2005); Maspero (2007: 1–27); Turcescu (2005).
- 160 Radde-Gallwitz (2018b) draws our attention to this model of Trinitarian unity that Gregory introduces, which he calls “the intentional activity model”.
- 161 Damascius, *On Principles* I.86.8–15 Ruelle (fr. 367 Smith). For a discussion of all relevant evidence and an argument to the effect that Porphyry's theory influenced the Cappadocians, see Dillon (1989a, 2007); cf. Edwards (2019: 105–108).
- 162 Gregory, *C. Eun.* II.953–956, GNO 263.21–265.10; *Vita Mosis* 376D–377B. See also Basil, *Letter* 234 (Loeb vol. III, 264–270); Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 28.4–5.
- 163 Philo, *De Posteritate* 166–169, *De exilio* 169; here and in the following I draw on Johannes Steenbuch's unpublished draft on apophatic theology.
- 164 ἄρρητος δ' ἔστι καὶ νῶ μόνω ληπτὸς (*Didask.* 165.5; cf. 164.31, 165.16–21). See Daniélou (1961: 306) and Moreschini (2020: 90).

# 3

## LOGIC AND EPISTEMOLOGY

### Introduction

Galen, one of the most philosophically minded scientists of late antiquity, claims that Christians do not offer any proofs or arguments in support of their teaching because Moses and Christ “order them to accept everything on faith”. Galen makes this claim twice in his extant works, both times in passing. His aim was not to criticize the Christians directly but rather those who operate like them. In his anti-Aristotelian essay *Against the First Unmoved Mover*, which is preserved only in Arabic,<sup>1</sup> Galen says:

Were I thinking of those who teach pupils in the manner of the followers of Moses and Christ, ordering them to accept everything on faith (*pistis*), I should not have given you a definition.

(Text 1)

And, in his treatise *On the Difference of Pulses*, Galen criticizes the theories of the doctor Archigenes, saying:

[H]e ought to have added to his assertion about the eight qualities a proof – or at least an argument – in order to avoid the impression that the reader, just as if he had entered a school of Moses or of Christ, was going to hear undemonstrated laws.

(*On the Difference of Pulses*, Kühn VIII, 579 (Text 2))

As these passages show, Galen does not target the Christians specifically; he rather takes them to be an example of the kind of teachers that one should try to avoid, namely those who make claims without offering any proof. As mentioned in the



Introduction, Galen is not alone in making this point. His contemporary Celsus makes a similar allegation; he claims that it is characteristic of the Hellenes to examine and prove their beliefs beyond doubt (*krinai kai bebaiōsasthai*), while the barbarians, that is, the Christians, merely invent their views (*C. Cels. I.2 (Text 3)*).<sup>2</sup> Another contemporary, Lucian, points out that Christians “receive their doctrines without any proof” (*pistis; Peregrinus 13 (Text 4)*). The same charge is repeated later, most likely by Porphyry, who accuses Christians of following “an unreasonable and unexamined faith” (*alogos kai anexetastos pistis; Eusebius, P.E. I.2.1 (Text 5)*; cf. *D.E. I.1.12*).<sup>3</sup>

A comment on the term *pistis* is in order here. As the passages cited above show, it can mean not only “faith” or “trust” but also “proof” (see LSJ *s.v.*). Text 5 suggests that the problem that the pagans have with the Christian *pistis* is not the existence of some kind of faith or trust in certain views, but rather that this faith is not based on an argument of some kind. The same point is also made by Texts 2 and 4. There is some sneering, I believe, on the part of pagans when they speak of the Christian *pistis*; what they sneer at is not the fact that Christians believe certain things but rather that they do not provide any proof in support of them, and in this regard they contrast Christianity with Hellenic, pagan culture. The fact that so many pagan philosophers make the same point is telling of how Christianity and Hellenic culture were perceived by adherents of the latter.

Such a point was not entirely unjustified given Paul’s statement “for Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Cor. 1:22–23). Following Paul, Christians do not completely deny the point that Galen, Celsus, and (presumably) Porphyry make. They are concerned, however, with replying to pagan accusations that Christians do not offer proofs of their views. Overturning Celsus’ claim is a central concern of Origen’s counterattack in his *Contra Celsum*. Origen argues that Christianity differs from Hellenic culture in that it works with proof proper to Christianity (*oikeia apodeixis*), which is a demonstration of the prophecies and of the power of the miracles and which, he continues, is more divine than any dialectical proof (*C. Cels. I.2*). We find a similar claim made by the author of the work *On Resurrection*, attributed (falsely) to Justin Martyr, who suggests that Christians use a special kind of demonstration, and this is the appeal to the word of truth sent by God (*On the Resurrection 1.1–10*).<sup>4</sup> Such claims rather confirm the pagan criticism against the Christians. This criticism was so strong that Eusebius wrote a long work, the *Demonstration of the Gospel (Evangelikē apodeixis)*, in order to contradict the view that Christians are uncritically committed to Christian faith, while his other major work, the *Preparation for the Gospel*, also sets out from the start to oppose the same criticism (*P.E. I.2–4*).<sup>5</sup>

The Christian concern with the pagan criticism that they do not give proofs for their views is indicative of the status of demonstration in Graeco-Roman antiquity. From what we know, it was not philosophers alone who employed demonstration systematically, but also orators, lawyers, politicians, and scientists – all of them wanted to convince by rational means, and demonstration of various kinds was

the standard way of achieving this. The nature of demonstration was traditionally part of logic in antiquity. Ancient logic, what the Greeks called *logikē*, included far more than the study of relations between terms and propositions – and in this sense it differs from the way we, moderns, understand logic. It also included the study of many more functions of *logos*, understood as language, speech, dialectical and scientific argument, reason, and thought. Accordingly, ancient logic covered the territory of grammar, dialectic, rhetoric, theory of argument, philosophy of language, as well as epistemology or theory of knowledge.

By the time Christianity emerged, the study of logic had long been an established and sophisticated field. Aristotle and Chrysippus had established categorical and propositional logic, respectively, and further developments took place around the turn of the era. The logical works of Aristotle were grouped together presumably in the second half of the first century BCE and were given the primary position in the corpus of Aristotelian works.<sup>6</sup> Alexander of Aphrodisias argued for the priority of theoretical over practical philosophy and considered logic as a valuable instrument (*In Analytica Priora* 4.30–35). Alexander appears to suggest that one must study logic first in order to acquire the necessary skills for appreciating Aristotle's arguments.<sup>7</sup> The first work in this arrangement of logical works, the *Categories*, received particular attention from Platonists, Peripatetics, and Stoics alike, and a lively debate arose about its subject matter. Roughly speaking, the ancient critics disagreed as to whether the *Categories* dealt with linguistic entities, that is, words having meaning, with classes of beings, or in a way with both. This debate came to a certain standstill only in the early fourth century CE with Porphyry, whose predominantly semantic interpretation of the work, as opposed to the ontological one assumed by Platonists such as Plotinus, prevailed. Porphyry represents a tendency among Platonists to integrate Aristotle's logic, which is already apparent in Plutarch and in Alcinous' *Didaskalikos*, a handbook of Platonist doctrines written in the late second or early third century CE (*De an. procr.* 1023E; *Didask.* chs. 4–6). Peripatetics such as Andronicus and Boethus were engaged in writing commentaries on Aristotelian logical works, as was Alexander of Aphrodisias, who highlighted the unique character of Aristotle's logic against allegations of its Platonist origins and in opposition to Stoic logic.

Besides philosophers, scientists such as Galen and Ptolemy (both active in the second century CE), had a strong interest in logic as well. The case of Galen is particularly interesting in this regard. His father taught him logic first (*On the Order of My Own Books*, vol. XIX, 59 Kühn), and he remained captivated by the subject. Galen reports that for several years of his life he trained himself in logic and in that period wrote commentaries on ancient logical works such as Aristotle's *De interpretatione*, *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics*, on Theophrastus' *On Affirmation and Negation* (*On the Order of My Own Books*, 39–42 Kühn). Additionally, Galen wrote his own works on syllogism, on demonstration, on epistemology, and on language. Galen devoted considerable work to the topic of demonstration alone; he says that he first trained himself in geometrical proofs and exhorts his readers to do the same.<sup>8</sup> His works on the subject include the treatise *On Demonstration* in 15 books, as well

as two shorter ones, *On Things Necessary For Demonstrations* and *On Demonstrative Discovery*, none of which is extant today.<sup>9</sup> Galen's engagement with logic was more than an intellectual pastime; he rather believed that logic is crucial for the medical practitioner, who not only wishes to be able to make judgements about disputed issues in medicine but also to properly classify diseases and treat them accordingly.<sup>10</sup> A similar view must lie behind Ptolemy's engagement with epistemology. Ptolemy made a name for himself with his contribution to astronomy, yet he also wrote on the criterion of knowledge. Seneca, Sextus Empiricus, and Epictetus were also knowledgeable in logic,<sup>11</sup> as was an intellectual with broad interests like Aulus Gellius.<sup>12</sup> This evidence suggests that not only philosophers but any pagan educated man in late antiquity tried to acquire some training in logic. The question now is how the Christians regarded it.

### Clement on demonstration and the *Categories* and Origen on logic

In the following I shall try to map out the engagement of early Christian philosophers with logic, and I shall focus particularly on Clement and Origen, who appear to be quite well versed on the subject. I shall start with Clement.

Clement is the first Christian thinker we know of who advances a theory of demonstration peculiar to Christianity. Given the allegations against Christians from philosophers such as Celsus and Galen, it should not come as a surprise that Clement articulates such a theory in polemical terms. Clement does this at the end of book 7 of his *Stromata*. After devoting most of the book to the life that is proper to the Christian wise man, the Gnostic, Clement moves on to address some queries (*aporiai*) raised by critics of Christianity, Greeks and Jews alike, who claim that there is no agreement between Christian schools of thought (*haireseis*) but rather much conflict, and hence draw the conclusion that there is no truth in Christianity.<sup>13</sup>

As we saw in Chapter 1, this is a well-known sceptical argument that also the Christians used against the ancient philosophical schools. Clement responds to it by pointing out that this argument fails to hit the target, because it groups together both good and bad, true and false branches of Christianity. The fact that there are bad or false doctors, Clement argues, need not and does not discourage a sick person from seeking a cure from a doctor (*Strom.* VII.15.90.4; cf. Origen, *C. Cels.* III.12); one must rather try to identify a good doctor. The case with Christianity must be similar, he claims; all we need to do is to distinguish between good and bad interpretations of Scripture and follow the former. Clement goes on to identify two kinds of criteria on the basis of which true and false impressions or judgements can be determined: common or natural criteria, such as those pertaining to the senses; and technical (*technika*) criteria, such as those of reason (*Strom.* VII.16.93.2). We also find the same distinction of criteria in Sextus and Galen.<sup>14</sup> This is not an accident. Clement must have wanted to show that Christians and pagans share the same kinds of criteria for truth. The question, however, is what he means when he speaks of criteria of reason.

Clement does not make that clear, but an answer emerges when he moves to introduce a technical method for distinguishing the truth. Although he does not explicitly say so, it is implied in his statement that those who fail to find the truth are not sufficiently trained in the rule (*kritēron*) by means of which we distinguish true from false (*Strom.* VII.16.94.6). What is this method? Clement argues that finding the truth cannot be carried out successfully “unless one receives the rule of truth (*ton kanona tēs alētheias*) from the truth itself” (*Strom.* VII.16.94.5).<sup>15</sup> But what does Clement mean with the phrase “rule of truth” and what does the “truth” amount to here?

At the beginning of this section (*Strom.* VII.15.90.2), Clement speaks of the ecclesiastical rule (*ton ekklesiastikon kanona*), which, he claims, should not be violated in the same sense that the good man should not break his promises. A number of similar passages in Clement’s work make evident that Clement has a special, Christian criterion or rule (*kanōn*) in mind, namely that of “the concord between the Law and the Prophets on the one hand and the Testament transmitted by the advent of the Lord on the other” (*Strom.* VI.15.125.3).<sup>16</sup> This shows that, for Clement, the technical criterion for truth in Christianity is a certain hermeneutical approach, namely the interpretation of Scripture in such a way that one part casts light on the other: the Old Testament on the New Testament. In this sense those who seek the truth do nothing, in his view, other than demonstrate the Scriptures while relying on the Scriptures themselves.<sup>17</sup> Clement actually uses the term “truth” (*alētheia*) in the relevant section of *Stromata* VII to refer to the truth of Scripture that concerns the Christian God (VII.15.91.3–8, 92.3–4). This is also what Eusebius does in the early fourth century; he identifies the proof of truth with the testimony of Scripture (*tēs kath’ hēmas alētheias apodeixis*; *P.E.* I.3.7). Similar in this regard also is Ps-Justin *On the Resurrection* (ch. 1). Apparently there is a widespread tendency among early Christians in identifying proof of truth with the testimony of Scripture.

One could justifiably here ask why we should accept the truthfulness of Scripture at all. We need to remember, however, that Clement is replying to an objection from the critics of Christianity, namely that Christianity is untrustworthy because Christian sects disagree with each other. And Clement’s reply to them is that this fact is not at all evidence that Christianity has failed to express the truth; the Christians who have attained the truth, Clement suggests, are those who interpret the Scriptures on the basis of the spirit of Scripture itself. False interpretations, Clement says, arise when people select what is ambiguous in Scripture and read their own doctrines into it (*eis tas idias metagousi doxas*; *Strom.* VII.16.96.1). Interestingly, Platonists speak similarly of those Platonists who misinterpret Plato, accusing them of representing and advocating their own view (*idion dogma*) and not that of Plato.<sup>18</sup>

But what about those who refuse to accept Scripture as source of truth? What is the compelling evidence that Scripture hosts the truth or even any truths at all? And how can this possibly be demonstrated? What is the proof that the sayings in Scripture are true?

In the available evidence Clement does not address such questions. From what we know, however, critics of Christianity asked exactly such questions. Clement speaks of those who “are not satisfied with mere salvation of faith but require proof as pledge of truth” (*Strom.* V.3.18.3), and he claims that it would be absurd for Christians to require proofs of that kind (II.5.24.3). The question, however, is why this should be the case.

Clement makes two claims, one general and one specific, which are relevant here. His general claim is that no knowledge can be reached without faith, without a conviction of some kind, as Hellenic philosophers also admit. The specific claim is that Christian faith is well justified. Let us look at these claims more closely.

Regarding the first, Clement points to a variety of different cases. One is the acceptance of indemonstrable principles (*anapodeiktoi archai*) by many schools of philosophy (*Strom.* II.4.13.4, II.4.14.3). The Pythagoreans, for instance, Clement suggests, endorse the views of Pythagoras without demanding further proof, and he also reminds us in this context of Heraclitus’ criticism of those who require proofs in order to conceal their lack of understanding (II.5.24.3–5; fr. 19 DK). Indemonstrable principles, Clement claims, can be preconceptions about God or about soul and body, intimations of truth such as those that the philosophers have in *Republic* 475e (II.5.23.2), or certain beliefs, such as the belief in the existence of providence; moral precepts, such as the view that parents must be honoured; or beliefs based on sense-perceptions, such as that snow is white and fire hot (V.1.6.1).

Clement makes a point here in claiming that Hellenic philosophers accept indemonstrable principles and take certain beliefs as starting points in their investigations. In the *Timaeus*, for instance, no attempt is made to demonstrate the existence of a divine craftsman; rather, his existence is assumed. Of course, this is part of a probable or figurative account (*Tim.* 29d), but later Platonists were committed to the existence of a divine demiurgic intellect and only debated its status and role. Indeed, Platonists vindicated the view that some things do not need demonstration. In his reply to Porphyry at the beginning of *On Mysteries*, for instance, Iamblichus argues that the existence of gods hardly needs any demonstration (I.1.203).

The right to assume indemonstrable principles, however, does not mean that one can postulate anything one wants; one rather needs to justify why certain principles are indemonstrable. Clement’s second claim addresses this worry. He suggests that the Christian faith is a “voluntary assent prior to demonstration” (*hekousios pro apodeixeōs sygkathesis*; *Strom.* II.5.27.4), a “voluntary preconception” (*prolēpsis hekousios*; II.2.8.4), or “voluntary assumption” (*hypolēpsis hekousios*; II.6.27.4–28.1). Clement has two targets here: not only those who require proofs of the Christian faith, such as the pagan critics, but also the Valentinian Gnostics who think of faith as a divine gift bestowed to a select few (II.3.10.1–3). Against the Valentinians Clement stresses the voluntary (*hekousios*) character of faith.<sup>19</sup> The term *sygkathesis* is significant in this regard. The term is of Stoic provenance and signifies the assent we give to an impression such as a sense impression (see Sextus, *A.M.* VII.150–157; Plutarch, *De stoic. rep.* 1056E–F; LS 41C, E). It is not simply the case

that we decide to give assent to an impression, according to the Stoics; rather, an impression is presented in such a way to our sense organs that it deserves assent; this is why we give assent.

We would expect that Clement should specify what is in the Christian faith that deserves such assent. Indeed, Clement does so. He argues that in the case of Christianity the element that deserves assent is something at least as strong as a perspicuous sense impression, and this, he says, is God.<sup>20</sup> For, Clement claims, nothing is more powerful than God (*Strom.* II.6.28.1). Clement calls this kind of assent “assent of piety” (*theosebeias syngkatathesis*). This phrase, as well as the terms “preconception” (*prolēpsis*) and “assumption” (*hypolēpsis*) that Clement uses in order to characterize Christian faith, suggest that this is not yet knowledge but only a step towards it.<sup>21</sup>

Preconceptions qualify as criteria of knowledge for Epicureans and Stoics.<sup>22</sup> Despite their differences concerning how preconceptions occur, both agree that these are universal notions, such as soul, body, man, and God. They also agree that sense-perceptions cannot be filled with content, that is, conceptual content, without preconceptions. Clement does refer to the Epicurean notion of preconception as a movement of the mind towards a perspicuous object (*epibolēn epi to enarges*; *Strom.* II.4.16.2). Clement argues that one such perspicuous object that does not need demonstration is the Christian God, because it is based on universal common notions such as the existence of God and his providence, and these notions are so evident that even critics of Christianity accept them (II.2.9.6).<sup>23</sup>

A similar view about gods is found in Epicureanism: a preconception of gods is a notion innate in human beings, the Epicureans claim, which explains in their view why all men agree on admitting the existence of gods (Cicero, *De nat. deor.* I.44).<sup>24</sup> The Stoics hold a similar view of the existence of gods; they also speak of an innate notion of gods and claim that such a belief is necessary in order to make sense of reality (*De nat. deor.* II.12). It is impossible, Chrysippus suggests, to fathom the harmony and rational character of the universe without assuming the existence of a higher, divine mind (II.17–19).

The problem, however, is that Clement does not distinguish here between the concept of God and the specific conception of the Christian God, but rather equates the two. He does this because he apparently believes that only the latter does justice to the concept of God – in his view only the Christian God is truly God. This is why he accuses the Greeks of atheism, for instance in *Stromateis* VII, because in his view they believe in a God who does not exist.<sup>25</sup> There is another interesting element here. When Clement speaks of a conception that is antecedent to, and a prerequisite for, human understanding (*Strom.* II.6.28.1), he appears to imply that we cannot make sense of reality at all unless we accept a certain preconception of God, namely the Christian one. This view reminds us of Augustine’s later claim that understanding requires faith, not the other way round (*De Trinitate* 15.27.49).

Clement takes up the subject of demonstration again in *Stromata* VIII. This last book of *Stromata* is clearly unfinished. It looks like an anthology of passages copied

from pagan sources and paraphrased. But there should not any doubt that Clement adapts this material to his goals and uses it to make a certain point, as I will explain below.<sup>26</sup>

The initial chapter that explains the subject matter of the book is worked out quite well. This, Clement claims, is scientific knowledge (*epistēmōnikē theoria*), which rests on enquiry (*zētēsis*). Clement specifies that the seeker of truth needs to rely on Scripture on the one hand and common concepts (*koinai ennoiai*) on the other (*Strom.* VIII.1.1.4), and he goes on to claim that the lover of truth must aim to arrive at the truth through scientific demonstration. The plan of the book appears, then, to fit what Clement said earlier in book 7 of the *Stromateis* not only in general terms concerning demonstration, but also more specifically; Clement's point that one needs to rely on common concepts and Scripture in order to find the truth captures his distinction in *Stromateis* VII between natural and technical criteria of distinguishing true from false judgements. Later, in book 8, Clement suggests that demonstration is the method that provides conviction on the basis of what is agreed upon (*ek tōn homologoumenōn*; VIII.3.5.1). The matters we agree on must be the common notions he mentions in the first chapter of book 8, as his relevant examples suggest, as later on he refers to widely held views (*endoxa*; VIII.3.7.8). In what follows, Clement sets out to establish guidelines for demonstration (VIII.2.3.1–4) and distinguishes different kinds, such as scientific demonstration, which includes syllogism or inference on the basis of evidence (VIII.2.3.1–6). It seems to me, then, that, unfinished as the book may be, it sets out to focus on demonstration and to do so from a Christian point of view.

More can be said about this point of view. Clement appears to be motivated by an anti-sceptical concern in *Stromateis* VIII. This is suggested by the fact that he appeals to standard anti-sceptical arguments, such as the *consensus omnium* within a linguistic community and of the semantics of the language itself as evidence for the view that secure knowledge is attainable (*Strom.* VIII.2.3.1–3). Epicureans and Stoics employed similar arguments (see Cicero, *De nat. deor.* I.44–6; II.12, 16, 18). Clement follows them also in appealing to the perspicuous character of the objects of sense-perception and intellection (*ta pros aisthēsīn te kai noēsīn enargōs phainomena*) as the ultimate evidence that cannot be questioned and can help us build demonstrations of what is not perspicuous (*Strom.* VIII.3.7.3–8.3). Clement's anti-sceptical concern becomes manifest at the end of the section on demonstration, where he goes on to directly address the Pyrrhonian sceptics (VIII.4.15.2). This part is not expressly connected with the section on demonstration, but one can understand why it follows that section.

There is good evidence to suggest that much of the material on demonstration in *Stromateis* VIII was taken from Galen, and in all probability from his lost work *On Demonstration*. The evidence includes a significant overlap of statements, distinctions, and examples used for the same purpose.<sup>27</sup> Most probably Clement used Galen's lost work and by doing so he combats Galen's view of Christianity with Galen's own weapons. This is a typical Christian strategy. Later on, Origen will use Plato to oppose the claims of the Platonist Celsus, and Eusebius will use

excerpts from Porphyry to discredit the latter's criticism of Christianity.<sup>28</sup> But there is something else that motivates Clement to draw on Galen, which is their common antipathy against scepticism. The aim of Galen's treatise *On Demonstration* was clearly motivated by sceptical arguments that point to conflicting appearances or disagreements in order to show the invalidity of such arguments.<sup>29</sup> Clement on the other hand does not show any engagement with scepticism outside *Stromateis* VIII and it is open to discussion whether his initial plan of the *Stromateis* included an engagement with scepticism such as the one we find in book 8.<sup>30</sup> Clement's overall project in the *Stromateis*, however, to speak of the wisdom of the Christian wise man, would justify an engagement with scepticism at the end of the *Stromateis*.

It must be Clement's same concern with scepticism that motivates him to connect things in the world with names and concepts. To do this, he appeals to Aristotle's doctrine of the *Categories*, thus becoming the first Christian to appeal to this work. Clement considers the categories to be "elements of beings in matter" (*stoicheia tōn ontōn en hylē*; *Strom.* VIII.8.23.6) to which "every subject matter of inquiry is subordinated" (VIII.8.23.3).<sup>31</sup> This formulation suggests that, for Clement, categories are ontological kinds under which things are classified. These ontological kinds, however, are not merely classifications of things according to Clement, but also correspond to universal concepts (*katholikai dianoiai*), of which Clement spoke earlier, claiming that these concepts were required for definitions (*Strom.* VIII.5.19.2). Let us focus more closely on how Clement understands Aristotle's categories.

Clement actually begins his section on the categories by focusing on speech (*peri tēn phōnēn*), distinguishing three of its aspects on the basis of Aristotle's *De interpretatione* 1, 16a4–9: (a) names that are symbols of meanings or concepts (*noēmata*) and symbols of things; (b) meanings or concepts (*noēmata*), which are, as he says, likenesses (*homoioēmata*) and imprints (*ektypōmata*) of things; and (c) the underlying things (*ta hypokeimena pragmata*, VIII.8.23.1). Strange as it might seem that Clement begins his account of the *Categories* with material drawn from the *De interpretatione*, this serves a purpose which becomes apparent in the analogy he subsequently introduces: just as all names are reducible (*anagetai*) to the finite, 24, elements (*stoicheia*) of language, the letters of the alphabet, similarly all beings (*onta*) are reducible to certain finite elements, the universals (*katholou*).<sup>32</sup> Clement argues that philosophers have discovered some elements (*stoicheia*) – that is, as he will presently state, the categories – under which everything in the world can be classified; this is how we manage to obtain knowledge, by relying on universals (VIII.23.3–4). He explicitly states that these universal classes are the Aristotelian categories, which he subsequently lists (VIII.8.23.5–6).<sup>33</sup> Clement concludes by stating that the categories are "elements of beings in matter" (VIII.8.23.6).

Clement does not explain what he means by "elements of beings in matter". It is important to notice, though, that in this context he speaks of beings in matter, because this means that he takes Aristotle's theory of categories to apply primarily or exclusively to sensible, material, beings. Apparently for Clement material beings are subject to predication, and predication is understood to be any of the



Aristotelian categories, namely substance, quality, quantity, relation, and so on. It must be precisely these predicates that are elements of beings in matter, in the sense that they constitute what material beings actually are, such as “animal”, “red”, “one metre long”, “in the marketplace”, etc. Such predicates make something what it is, and in this sense they are elements of it, that is, elements of a material being.

The complication, however, is that Clement understands the Aristotelian categories (substance, quality, etc.) not only as elements of material beings but also as elements of *noēmata* (*Strom.* VIII.23.1, 3). It is striking that he speaks of beings (*onta*) that are infinite and not just of things, meaning thereby both things and *noēmata*.<sup>34</sup> One question that arises here is how the categories, the universal elements (*ta katholou*; *Strom.* VIII.8.23.3), relate to material beings on the one hand and to *noēmata* on the other.

Once again Clement does not offer an explicit answer. Several hints, however, help us reconstruct his underlying view. As I have stated above, Clement establishes an analogy between things and elements such as the categories on the one hand and names and letters on the other – just as the infinite number of names is reducible to the twenty-four elements of language, the letters, so is an infinite amount of things reducible to certain finite elements, to the ten categories. Clement describes a thing as subordinate (*hypotassomenon*; *Strom.* VIII.8.24.1) to a certain class, such as substance, quality, relation, that is, to one of the Aristotelian categories. But Clement had earlier suggested that not only things (*hypokeimena pragmata*) but also *noēmata* are reducible to universal classes, the categories (VIII.8.23.3). Clement seems to then suggest that the categories are universals classifying both things and concepts (*noēmata*), and in this sense they constitute elementary kinds of beings. Clement apparently implies a correspondence between classes of things and concepts. Noticeably, however, Clement distinguishes concepts both from individual things, that is, from particulars, as well as from universal forms: he suggests that forms are immaterial (*ayla*) entities and as such they can be conceived only through the intellect (*nous*), while the concepts are grasped by and exist in reason (*logōi*; VIII.8.23.6). Clement’s distinction is reminiscent of the distinction made by contemporary Platonists between transcendent and immanent Forms or between two kinds of *logoi*, transcendent and immanent.<sup>35</sup> The crucial point nonetheless remains: for Clement, the Aristotelian categories are classes of both things and concepts; they function as elementary concepts by means of which we classify both things in the world and concepts in our minds and thus define and apprehend them. It is in this sense that the Aristotelian categories are elements of beings in matter and of concepts; they are classes of both material beings and of concepts. For Clement, however, concepts are also related to names, since names are symbols of concepts.<sup>36</sup> This suggests that, in Clement’s view, Aristotle’s theory of categories aims to tie together particular things with both universal concepts and names.

This interpretation of the *Categories* is remarkable in that it combines the ontological and the semantic interpretations of the work that were available in antiquity.

We know that Platonists such as Nicostratus, Lucius, and, later, Plotinus opted for the former, while Peripatetics such as Andronicus, Boethus, and Porphyry argued primarily for the latter. I say “primarily” because Porphyry takes the categories to be about significant words, that is, words significant of thoughts and which refer to things (see Porphyry, *In Cat.* 58.3–15, 59.31–3). Clement comes close to Porphyry’s interpretation and in a way anticipates it. By taking this mixed interpretation of the *Categories*, Clement shows in what sense universal kinds, such as species and genera, exist: as classes of things and of concepts.<sup>37</sup> And this is important for Clement because he, following Aristotle, takes universals to be the proper subject matter of science (*epistēmē*; *Strom.* VIII.7.23.2; cf. Aristotle, *Post. An.* 71a17–19, 75b21–36, 85b13–15).

Science, Clement argues, sets out to classify particulars under universals and to construct theorems of general validity (*Strom.* VII.8.23.2). By outlining classes of predicables under which all words signifying things are classified, such as substance, quality, quantity, and so on, Aristotle’s theory of categories aims to show, according to Clement, the universal kinds under which we classify particular things; they also aim to show that we are in a position to form universal concepts under which we classify particulars. Such knowledge of universals enables us to achieve scientific knowledge. This is the central subject matter of *Stromata* VIII. Perhaps Clement was collecting this material in order to construct an argument against sceptical claims disputing the attainability of truth. It may well be that Clement’s appeal to the doctrine of the categories forms part of his effort to outline an anti-sceptical epistemology: Aristotle’s categories are important elements for human cognition insofar as they constitute classes under which we classify things in the world and think or conceive of them in everyday life. If Clement put the theory of categories to such use, he could also address critics such as Celsus and Galen, who were in agreement with the sceptics on the criticism that Christianity is dogmatic. Clement would have been happy to show to pagan critics that Christianity was no more dogmatic than any other Hellenic school of thought and with Celsus and Galen themselves.

Origen employs a similar strategy when dealing with Celsus’ criticisms and defends the logical character of Christianity. Origen appreciated and was skilled in logic. As we have seen in Chapter 1 (pp. 40–41), Origen mentions logic as a philosophical discipline which some consider as distinct, but he disagrees with them and takes logic to be integrated in the three other branches of philosophy, ethics, physics, and theoretical philosophy. Origen speaks of logic thus:

Logic is, or as we say, the discipline of reason, that is the one that deals with the meanings of words and prepositions, their proper and improper uses, their kinds and species, and teaches us about the various forms of prepositions. This is then a discipline that does not need to be separated from the other disciplines of philosophy but rather should be mingled with and integrated in them.

(*Comm. in Song of Songs* Prol. 3.2)<sup>38</sup>

This passage is not our sole evidence that Origen is familiar with the subject matter of logic. Origen's disciple Gregory Thaumaturgos states that Origen's curriculum in Alexandria included logic, dialectic, and astronomy.<sup>39</sup> Similarly Eusebius states that Origen taught geometry and arithmetic as subjects preliminary to Christian philosophy (*H.E.* VI.18.3). Origen conforms to a widely used model of education here. Justin's Pythagorean teacher also required Justin to study astronomy, music, and geometry before turning to theology (*Dial.* 2.6), Galen was trained in geometrical proofs, as I mentioned earlier, and Clement argues that the Christian Gnostic will use sciences such as music, arithmetic, astronomy, and dialectic as means of finding the truth (*Strom.* VI.10.80.1–4, 84.1–2). Origen follows up this model by urging Christians to follow Hellenic philosophers in studying geometry, music, grammar, rhetoric, and astronomy as subjects instrumental to philosophy.<sup>40</sup>

We witness Origen employing his knowledge of logic, especially Stoic logic,<sup>41</sup> when discussing God's foreknowledge and its possible deterministic role in human reality. Origen notes that the handling of the issue requires skill in logic and a sharp mind and sets out to show that Celsus lacks both (Origen, *Commentary on the Epist. to Romans* I; *Philokalia* ch. 25.2; SC 226: 220). Origen distinguishes foreknowledge and causal determination, claiming that God's knowledge does not determine things, as Celsus suggested.<sup>42</sup> He argues against Celsus that foreknowledge and prediction do not rule out the possibility that predicted events turn out otherwise (*C. Cels.* II.20). Celsus apparently employed the so-called lazy argument, often found in anti-Stoic polemic (Cicero, *De fato* 12.28), according to which what is fated will happen no matter what you do; if you are fated to recover from illness, you will do so, no matter whether you call a doctor or not. Origen is not using it with regard to the issue of fate and free will but rather focuses on its logical implications. He accuses Celsus first of not understanding that this argument is a sophism, and second of not employing a sufficiently sophisticated logical terminology: Celsus says that a predicted future event will happen "by all means" (*pantōs*), but this, Origen suggests, should not be taken as "necessarily" (*katēnagkasmēnōs*), as presumably Celsus intended, because such an event is only possible. If the event in question nevertheless takes place, namely that I die, it does not mean that it was necessary and that there was no point in calling a doctor to cure me, but that it was only possible, that is, something potentially true but still capable of being false.<sup>43</sup> And it also does not mean that the event was caused by the person who predicted it. Origen repeats a stock Stoic argument here: a seer's prediction of an event does not amount to causing it (Seneca, *Nat. Quaest.* II.38.4). Origen concludes that Celsus ignores the difference between contingent and necessary events, and this is indicative, he claims, of Celsus' limited knowledge of logic.

There is some depth to Origen's understanding of Stoic logic. This becomes apparent when Origen addresses specifically Celsus' argument concerning the prophecies of the Old Testament about Jesus (*C. Cels.* VII.12). Celsus argued that the prophets had neither predicted nor not predicted the suffering of Jesus, and this means, he claimed, that they had failed to predict Jesus' suffering because this is an event that would be naturally impossible (VII.14–15). Origen presents Celsus'

argument as follows (VII.15). If the prophets predicted that Jesus would suffer, this would happen to him, because they had said the truth. If they made the same prediction about Jesus, Jesus would not suffer, because this is something which is naturally impossible to a divine person. This means, then, Celsus infers, that the prophets did not predict Jesus' suffering.

Once again Origen is primarily concerned with the logical implications of the argument, not with its subject matter. He carefully analyses Celsus' argument. This, he says, has the form of the Stoic syllogism of two conditionals (*dia dyo tropikōn*), that is, a syllogism consisting of two conditionals with the same antecedent and contradictory consequents (VII.15).<sup>44</sup> "When two conditional propositions result in opposite conclusions by the logical theorem known as that from two conditionals, the antecedent of the two conditionals is denied" (VII.15). Origen gives the schematic form of this syllogism as follows:

If the first, then the second;  
 if the first, then not the second;  
 – Therefore not the first.

Origen borrows from the Stoics the following example of such a syllogism:

If you know you are dead, you are dead [If p, q]  
 If you know you are dead, you are not dead [if p, ¬q]  
 – Therefore not: you know you are dead [¬p]

Origen cites the Stoic demonstration to explain the above syllogism.

If you know that you are dead, what you know is true, then it is true that you are dead. But if you know that you are dead, it is also true that you know that you are dead. But inasmuch as a dead man knows nothing, clearly if you know that you are dead, you are not dead. Therefore it follows that you do not know that you are dead.

The syllogism that Origen cites is valid, as is Celsus' syllogism. The problem with Celsus' syllogism, however, is that it has false premises. Origen claims that Celsus brought together premises that do not occur in Scripture and his hypothesis is absurd (*C. Cels.* VII.14–15). In this sense, his syllogism is not applicable and has no force against the targeted Christian doctrine concerning the prediction of the prophets and the fated character of Jesus' suffering. Celsus, Origen suggests, means to do violence to truth.<sup>45</sup>

Origen uses logic as a weapon against pagan critics such as Celsus, who profess to be trained in philosophy and in logic most especially. He held that the greatest vice in argument is to accuse the opponent of unsound consequences when the implications of one's own argument deserve the very same charge (*C. Cels.* VI.53).<sup>46</sup> And he wants to show to pagan critics such as Celsus that Christians do

not merely rely on faith but know how to construct and analyse arguments too. It is true that Origen displays a degree of familiarity with logic that is not common among Christian philosophers. The fact, however, that Christian philosophers exhibit a limited interest in logic does not necessarily mean a lack of the relevant skill. Origen displays his knowledge of logic in the framework of a polemical argument and in connection with a metaphysical issue, the causation of events. This instance actually explains why he thinks that logic is integrated with the other parts of philosophy, as he claims in the passage cited above (p. 113, *Comm. in Song of Songs* Prol. 3.2). As a rule, though, logic does not have much to offer in the discussion of metaphysical or ethical issues that interest Christian philosophers most, such as God's relation to the world, the nature of the human soul and its relation to God and to the body, and especially the question of how we should live or how we should treat our fellow humans, and this may well explain their limited interest in it. Some Christian thinkers openly claim that logic has little to offer to the subjects that most concerned Christians. This is Lactantius' position. Turning to logic as the assumed third part of philosophy, he writes:

[D]ivine learning has no need of this [i.e. logic], because wisdom is not in the tongue but in the heart, and it is not concerned with what sort of speech you use, for it is things, not words that we seek. And we are discussing not grammar, not oratory, the knowledge of which it is fitting to speak, but we are concerned with wisdom whose doctrine is how it is necessary to live.

(*Div. Inst.* III.13)

Lactantius goes on to argue that the only part of philosophy that is important is ethics, and he refers to Socrates as an example of someone who focused only on this aspect of philosophy. Lactantius reminds us in this context of the Epicureans, who also had little respect for logic and were mostly concerned with ethics. What is noticeable in the case of Lactantius, though, is that he is primarily thinking of rhetoric and dialectic when he speaks of logic. He claims that rhetoric is of no use for Christian wisdom. This is quite remarkable because Lactantius was an eminent rhetorician, appointed by Emperor Diocletian as a professor of rhetoric in Bithynia.

Basil and Gregory of Nyssa conform to the overall Christian view of logic. As we will see below, they engage with a logical issue, the status and function of linguistic items, because Arius' follower Eunomius presented a certain theory of language in support of his view about the nature of Christian God. This was, of course, a crucial issue for Christianity. Gregory also has a theory of knowledge, which, as we shall see, has an important metaphysical dimension, as it underlies a certain view about the relation between man and God. Like Clement, Gregory realizes that Christian thought requires a certain epistemological outlook, but he finds the part of logic that deals with how syllogism and demonstration works to be of less value, although he indicates that he has quite some familiarity with these subjects (see *C. Eum.* II.79–83, GNO 250.3–251.14).

## Basil and Gregory of Nyssa on names

It is characteristic of Clement's realist view that he takes not only concepts as corresponding to things in the world but also names or words, a view that he allegedly finds in Aristotle's *Categories* and *De interpretatione*. The role of language in representing reality would become even more frequently debated in the subsequent centuries. We see this quite clearly in Porphyry's commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories* and *De interpretatione*. There is a complex set of issues behind this increase in interest. One issue is how we come to know reality through the use of words and how we communicate it to others. Another issue is how words apply to things, how successful this is, and how we learn to do it. These issues are all closely connected. Porphyry found Aristotle's theory of categories attractive on the grounds that it classifies the infinite number of things into a finite number of classes of names or predicables. Similarly, in language a finite number of words signify an infinite number of things. Porphyry appears to have endorsed a theory of concept formation according to which we form concepts by abstracting the immaterial essence or form of a thing.<sup>47</sup> In his view, concepts mediate between words and things; we name something X or Y because we have the concept of X or Y, which we communicate to others by means of words. As we have seen, Clement finds a similar view on this point in the *Categories*. What is more, Clement apparently distinguishes two kinds or classes of concepts: concepts of individuals (*noēmata*) and concepts of general entities (*katholou*), such as substance, quality, quantity, place (the Aristotelian categories), as well as hierarchy between the two, such that forms fall in the latter category.<sup>48</sup>

Christians were aware from very early on that linguistic descriptions can be of utmost importance when applied to God and his relation to the world. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, Christians discarded the ambiguous philosophical terminology of creation, replacing *gignesthai* and *genētos* with derivatives from *ktizein*, such as *ktisis* and *ktistos*, for the created world and *aktistos* for anything pertaining to the divine creator, because these terms leave no doubt that the world is a generated entity while God is not. Here, however, another question arises, namely whether names can describe God, given his ontological difference from the created world.

We saw in Chapter 2 again that the ontological status of God became a tantalizing issue and eventually a source of conflict for Christians. There were two crucial questions here. What kind of principle is God such that he accounts for the creation of the world? How exactly should God be conceived and, more specifically, in what sense do three persons exist in divinity? The second issue caused even more controversy than the first. Arius defended the view that the Father and the Son are of similar but not the same substance (*ousia*), since the Father is uncreated while the Son is a creation of the Father. Arianism continued to flourish after its condemnation at the Council of Nicaea, and one aspect on which the conflict then turned was how names applied to God. Eunomius, a follower of Arius' theology, was on one side of the debate and Basil and Gregory of Nyssa were on the other. Each of the latter two wrote a work against

Eunomius, Basil around 363/364, targeting Eunomius' *Apology*, while about 20 years later Gregory wrote a reply to Eunomius' *Apology for the Apology*, which was written as a response to Basil's work.<sup>49</sup>

The Anomoeans supported their view of the ontologically distinct nature of the two divine entities, Father and Son, particularly focusing on how names were applied to God the Father and God the Son.<sup>50</sup> Eunomius apparently claimed that the difference in substance between the divine persons is suggested by the different names applied to them, such as Father, Son, Spirit (Basil, *C. Eun.* II.1.5–9). The name "Son" already reveals, according to Eunomius, the kind of substance the Son is, namely a created one (*C. Eun.* II.1.5–9). Yet Eunomius went further than that and defended the view that names quite generally reveal the essences of things; names, Eunomius suggests, exist by nature or, more precisely, by God and fit the natures of things (Gregory, *C. Eun.* II.198, GNO 282.30–283.2). If this is the case, Gregory claims, Eunomius then thinks of God as a teacher or grammarian who taught names to the first humans (Gregory, *C. Eun.* II.397–398, GNO 342.19–21). But this is an impossible view, Gregory argues – names are human creations. According to Scripture (Genesis 2:19–20), Gregory argues, it was Adam who gave names to things (*C. Eun.* II.402, GNO 343.26–344.3). Furthermore, Gregory continues, the evidence of different languages speaks against Eunomius' view (*C. Eun.* II.406–408, GNO 344.24–345.11).<sup>51</sup>

Eunomius' position is reminiscent of the naturalistic theory of names outlined by Hermogenes in Plato's *Cratylus*, and it is with reason that Gregory accuses Eunomius of drawing on that source (*C. Eun.* II.404–406, GNO 344.13–17).<sup>52</sup> Origen upheld a similar view, arguing against the position that names are conventions (*C. Cels.* I. 24–25, V.45) and also claimed, following Genesis, that originally there was only one language, Hebrew, which was given by God to his favoured nation (V.30–31; cf. Eusebius, *P.E.* IV.4.2). But now Eunomius takes the naturalistic position on language in order to substantiate a theological view about the persons of the divine trinity. Apparently he reads Genesis in the way that Origen did and he may have been inspired by Origen in this regard. Let us see how Basil summarizes Eunomius' position and how he then replies to it.

Using a sophistic argument [sc. Eunomius] deceives himself; for he thinks that the difference in substance (*ousia*) is made clear also by the distinctions in names. But what sane person would agree with the logic that there must be a difference of substances for those things whose names are distinct? For the designations of Peter and Paul and all people in general are different, but there is a single substance for all of them. For this reason, in most respects we are the same as one another, but it is only due to the distinguishing marks (*idiōmasi*) considered in connection with each one of us that we are different each from the other. Hence the designations do not signify the substances but the distinctive features (*idiotētes*) that characterize the individual.

(*C. Eun.* II.3.19–4.9, DelCogliano trans. slightly modified)

Against Eunomius' view that names reveal substance and indicate differences in substance, Basil argues that names signify substance and properties. The name "man", for instance, signifies the substance "man" and a number of properties peculiar to man, such as being rational, mortal, bipedal, two-handed, and so on. All men are "man" in substance, as they share properties characteristic of humanity, such as rationality, mortality, having two feet and two hands, yet they also have features that divide the common substance and differentiate one man from another in terms of size, shape, abilities, and so on (Basil, *C. Eun.* II.28.32–35). These differences, however, do not destroy the sameness of substance, Basil suggests (*to homophyes tēs ousias*; *C. Eun.* II.28.32–35). When someone points to "Peter" or "Paul", Basil argues, he does not make us think of the *ousia* of Peter or Paul, let alone of their different *ousiai*, but he makes us think of the sum of their distinct properties (*idiōmatōn syndromēn*; Basil, *C. Eun.* II.4.9–21). By referring to these properties, Basil claims, names allow us to identify an individual, such as Paul or Peter. This is also the case with the divine names, Basil argues; they signify different properties of God, not different *ousiai* of God.<sup>53</sup> "Father" and "Son" are distinct features of the divine substance, which show the respects in which the same divine substance differs (*C. Eun.* II.28.43–44). If Eunomius were right, Basil argues, names such as "created" and "begotten" would amount to different substances which in fact signify the same thing: something created (*C. Eun.* II.5, 6–9). As a consequence, God would be many substances, which is impossible; God only has different properties (I.8.22–28).

Gregory makes the same point (*Ex communibus notionibus*, PG 45, 177B). The names "Father" and "Son", he claims, do not designate different substances but only different properties (*idiōmata*), in the same way that the names "Peter" and "Paul" designate one substance, man, as well as the different properties that distinguish them (*Ex communibus notionibus* 180CD). Similarly, names such as "unbegotten" (*agennētos*) and "begotten" (*gennētos*), Gregory argues, signify only properties, just as "the sitting" of Theaetetus mentioned in the *Sophist* (263A) signifies only a property of Theaetetus (Gregory, *C. Eun.* II.916–917, GNO 232.19–26). Similarly, Gregory suggests, names we apply to God such as creative (*dēmiourgikos*), providential (*pronoētikos*), uncreated (*agennētos*), and so on, do not signify substance but only properties, namely God's effect on, or conception by, us. Against Eunomius' view that names exist by nature, fit the nature of things, and reveal a thing's substance, Gregory instead argues that names in general are human constructions, inventions of the human mind (*C. Eun.* II.148, GNO 268).<sup>54</sup> This, however, he claims, does not mean that names are arbitrary; they rather reflect our conception (*epinoia*) of things (*C. Eun.* II.125, GNO 262), and the existence of different languages confirms this. This is the case also with regard to divine names.

The arguments of Basil and Gregory are not fatal for Eunomius' position. Eunomius' reference to the names "Father" and "Son" means to show that these, as relative terms, apply to different individuals or substances. And, as these names show, one of these individuals is created. Eunomius also goes a step further. He claims that all names applying to God the Father are synonymous – that is, they do



not signify what they usually do – because God the Father, unlike all other entities, is simple and unbegotten. For this reason, Eunomius coins the term *agennēsia* (unbegottenness) as the only one that captures God’s substance. The following passage reflects Eunomius’ position.

What person of sound mind would not accept that some names have only their pronunciation and utterance in common, but not their meaning? For example, when “eye” is said of a human being and God, for the former it signifies a part of the body while for the latter it signifies sometimes God’s care and protection of the righteous, sometimes his knowledge of events. In contrast, the majority of the names [used of God] have different pronunciations but the same meaning. For example, *I am* [Exod. 3:14] and *only true God* [John 17:3].

(Eunomius, *Apology* 16.9–17.3, Vaggione; in Basil, *C. Eun.* II.22, trans. DelCogliano)

At the root of Eunomius’ claim lies the belief that names and meanings are distinct; different names can have the same meaning, and one and the same name can have different meanings, depending on its application. The name “eye,” for instance, he claims, has a different meaning when applied to man and when applied to God; in the case of God it applies only metaphorically. What is problematic in Eunomius’ theory is that it is difficult to explain how the same name can have a variety of meanings, and it is even harder to explain how different names can be synonymous when applied to God.<sup>55</sup> Is it the case that the application of a name determines its meaning and that a new meaning derives from the standard, usual meaning that a name normally has?

Basil argues that the upshot of Eunomius’ theory is that God becomes a substance with many names (*polyōnymos*), all of which have the same account or definition (*logos*), as is the case with synonymous names such as “sword” and “blade”. Basil claims that this is absurd because it contradicts the actual meaning of names; he instead argues that each name applied to God has a distinct account or definition, as is the case in general with names. When we say of God that he is providential, benevolent, or “light” and “way”, we name different, not synonymous, aspects or features of God (Basil, *C. Eun.* I.7.8–15). The names we apply to God form part of our concept of God, which cannot be grasped by a single name, as Eunomius thought, because God is a cluster concept, that is, a concept consisting of many properties (cf. Gregory, *C. Eun.* II.145, GNO 267.21–27). There are many ways of conceiving and naming God depending on the perspective we take at a given moment (Gregory, *C. Eun.* II.475–476, GNO 364.23–365.24).

Eunomius apparently argued that this view cannot be true, because it assumes a plurality of divine features while God’s substance must be utterly simple, and only Eunomius’ newly coined term *agennēsia* could do justice to God’s simplicity. But this cannot possibly be the case, Gregory replied, because all names signifying privation do not reveal what something is, the substance of something, as Eunomius claimed, but only what is not (Gregory, *C. Eun.* II.142–145, GNO 266.26–267.27).

Basil and Gregory are right to claim that God's simplicity is not threatened by the plurality of names, because a thing does not acquire a component when described in another linguistic way. Similarly, we do not deny the simplicity of God's substance when we use many names, because names are human ways of describing the divine substance.<sup>56</sup> Quite the opposite is the case, Gregory suggests: if we want to do justice to God we need to use many names, because no single name is comprehensive (*perilēptikon*) enough to describe God fully (Gregory, *C. Eun.* II.145, GNO 267.21–28). The fact, however, that by means of different names we grasp different aspects of the notion of God does not mean that God is fully graspable by the human mind. Basil claims that the notion of God is destined to always remain wanting despite our various conceptualizations expressed in the names we apply to God (*C. Eun.* I.10.1–5). In this sense, Basil suggests, God is incomprehensible to the human mind (I.12.1–7).<sup>57</sup> Since God is unlimited (*apeiros*), Gregory adds, human understanding of God will never be complete; this is why we apply negative names to God (*C. Eun.* II.192–195, GNO 280.22–281.21).<sup>58</sup>

### The question of knowledge

The theory of names that Basil and Gregory advance has an important epistemological side to it. They maintain that names are significant insofar as they correspond to concepts. This means that names are not merely labels but that they capture a mental item, a concept by means of which we grasp things in the world. Gregory in particular argues that man has the cognitive ability to perceive things as they are and to label them with names (*C. Eun.* II.283, 401), and by doing so he maintains the rational nature that God granted human beings (*C. Eun.* II.197). Gregory claims that we, humans, have invented all kinds of things in order to live well, including the arts and sciences, because we are able to conceive things, which is a gift from God (II.178–186). A special human ability is involved here, namely the ability to invent and to abstract. Gregory names this ability or faculty *epinoia*, a term he uses also in order to signify our conception of things, as I have observed earlier (*C. Eun.* II.125, GNO 262). The latter is the standard use of the term *epinoia*. The term, probably of Stoic origin,<sup>59</sup> is often used in late antiquity by authors such as Alexander and Porphyry, to denote what exists only in the mind and not in sensible reality.<sup>60</sup> Gregory uses the term also to denote the human faculty of invention; he argues that the *epinoia* is the origin of all branches of learning, such as geometry, physics and logic, of philosophy, and also of practical crafts such as agriculture, the skill of navigation, and the skill of taming animals. All these benefits, he says, have been achieved by *epinoia*. Here is how he defines it:

According to my definition *epinoia* is a way of finding things that we ignore. With regard to the object of an inquiry, *epinoia* manages to find it by considering the first thought about that object and proceeding to what comes next. For after understanding something about the object of our inquiry, we adjust

to the first idea that which comes next, thanks to the notions (*noēmata*) that we discover in the course of time, and thus we bring the task to conclusion.  
(*C. Eun.* II.182)

Gregory takes an important step here; he distinguishes between *epinoia* and notions (*noēmata*). We discover *noēmata*, notions or concepts, by means of *epinoia*, which is described as a way or method (*ephodos*) of finding what we ignore. Gregory develops Origen's doctrine of *epinoiai*, and more specifically Basil's view on *epinoia*,<sup>61</sup> who also distinguishes between *epinoia* and *noēma*. Origen introduces the term *epinoia* into Christian discourse when he discusses the various ways of conceiving of God, that is, God the Son, the wisdom of the Father and creator. In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Origen claims that the different *epinoiai* of God the Son we have are only conceptually distinct, since God the Son is essentially a unity.<sup>62</sup> The *epinoiai* are human conceptualizations of God the Son and of his contribution to the creation of the world.<sup>63</sup> Basil sets out to explain what *epinoia* is and he distinguishes it from fantasies, fictions, and false thoughts. The following two passages are indicative:

We see then that what seems simple and singular to the direct application of the intellect (*athroais epibolais tou nou*) in common usage but appears complex and plural upon detailed scrutiny, being divided by the intellect, these are divided only by *epinoia*.

(Basil, *C. Eun.* I.6, 21–25)

The name of *epinoia* then does not apply to false and inexistent fantasies, but is the name given to the more subtle and precise reflection of an object after a first conception (*noēma*) has been made from sense-perception.

(Basil, *C. Eun.* I.6, 39–44)

Both passages converge in maintaining that *epinoia* is what we generate with our minds, elaborating on the mental image that our intellect first grasps. There is actually little difference between the first and the second passage; both assert that *epinoia* is a later product of our minds that comes about as a result of an elaboration on a mental image, an initial intellectual grasp that we have of something.<sup>64</sup> To follow Basil's example, we conceive of something as grain which we can afterwards consider and accordingly call "fruit", "seed", or "nourishment"; all these are aspects of the same thing made up conceptually (*kat' epinoian*). Basil distinguishes here between *epinoia* and *noēma*, as Gregory later does.<sup>65</sup> The *epinoia* is responsible for the generation of further *noēmata*, notions: we can think of something, such as grain, as X, Y, or Z, fruit, nourishment, or blessing. In this manner, further notions are generated from a first one. Basil is quick to apply his theory of *epinoia* to the discussion of divine names and thereby articulate a satisfactory answer to the challenge posed by Eunomius' theory of names and his neo-Arian theology (*C. Eun.* I.7).<sup>66</sup>

The fact that we use names in order to communicate a concept means that concepts have linguistic or propositional content. God is an exception in that he cannot be fully cognized despite the different names we apply to him, which correspond to different conceptualizations of him, because God is an infinite entity. We have seen earlier that Christians like Clement maintained a link between the human mind and the world, such that knowledge of the latter is secure. Aristotle and the Stoics defended versions of such a view. While both talked about concepts through which we cognize sensible particulars, neither, however, granted them existence outside sensible particulars and minds. This is the position that the Christians also take.

As we have seen in Chapter 2 (pp. 78–87), Christians such as Origen, Basil, and Gregory maintain that God as an intellect has thoughts, and the world comes into being through their instantiation and combination. On this view, the world is nothing but instantiated and combined divine thoughts. This view has an epistemological corollary: the things of the world are intelligible to the extent that their identities can be traced back to God. This means that the world and everything in it is intelligible and can be known. But they can be known by intellectual beings like humans, who operate with concepts that correspond to things, that is, to classes of things, like trees, men, substances, and so on. This is perhaps why Clement, as we have seen earlier (p. 112), wanted to connect individuals with concepts. Clement, however, does not spell out the epistemological dimension of his move. A more systematic attempt at an epistemological theory comes from Gregory of Nyssa.

In his work *On the Creation of Man* (*De hominis opificio*), Gregory devotes an entire section to the nature of human intellect (*nous*). Gregory claims that the human intellect is something that God gave to man and something that God shares with man, which means that man is of the same intellectual nature as God (*De hom. opif.* 149B). Gregory claims that man is an intellectual entity (*noeros*), yet human intellect, unlike God's, operates through bodily organs (149BC). This happens in two ways (152B): first, the intellect expresses itself through speech and, second, comes to know through the senses. Gregory likens the intellect's connection with the senses to a city that has many entrances; as with the entrances leading to the same city, so too are the sense data of the various senses channelled to the intellect (152CD). In a way reminiscent of the *Theaetetus* (184d–185b), Gregory argues that it is not the senses but rather the intellect that knows through the senses (*dia tōn aisthēseōn ho nous energei*; 152A).<sup>67</sup>

One question that arises here, of course, is how the intellect remains unified and forms a specific, unified view or sense impression of the sense object while operating through various channels, namely the senses, and while receiving diverse information. Gregory rejects the views of those who localize the intellect in the brain, such as Plato and Galen. As an intelligible entity the intellect does not have a seat, yet it does shape and inform the entire body. Gregory argues this in the following passage:

[T]he intellect permeates the whole instrument [the body] and applies to every member of the body through the intellectual activities (*noētikais ener-*

*geiais*) that are proper according to nature, and it exercises its own power on what is in conformity with nature, while on what is too weak to receive its skilful motion (*technikē kinesis*), it remains inert and inactive.

(*De hom. opif.* 161B)

The point that Gregory makes in this passage is that the intellect is present in the entire body and shapes it accordingly. It is not merely the case that the intellect receives information from the bodily sense organs and cognizes through them; the case rather is that the body is already informed by the intellect in ways proper to each body part. In this sense the body that accommodates an intellect becomes a certain kind of body – one that can interact with the intellect. Gregory likens the human body to a musical instrument (*De hom. opif.* 149BC). A musical instrument is made in such a way as to produce music, yet someone ignorant of the art of music cannot put such an instrument to its proper use. Only a musician, someone with musical skill, can make a musical instrument work according to its nature. Similarly, the human body can function according to its nature, which is that of an intellectual being, only by the agency of someone who has received intellect; otherwise, the intellect remains inert and inactive in the body and the body does not function properly.

Both the musical analogy and the city analogy aim to show that the intellect is the unifying factor of the human body, the entity that structures, unifies, and maintains our body as a living human body. This unity, however, is not a given; it rather depends on the use we make of the intellect (*De hom. opif.* 164AB). If we do not maintain our body in accordance with the intellect, our nature will be dissolved and divided (*lyetai kai diapistei*; 164AB), and in this manner wickedness (*to kakon*) arises. Gregory treats the intellect as an immaterial power that shapes human nature in the same sense that a Platonic Form shapes the identity of an object and makes something what it is. This becomes clear when Gregory claims that the intellect's departure from the body results in the formlessness of the latter (*amorphia*), which is the case with matter deprived of form (161D).

Later on in the same treatise, however, Gregory appears to make the intellect responsible only for dianoetic human activity (168C). In this context he distinguishes between a rational and non-rational part of the soul, which, as he says, is active in dreams, for instance. The dreamer, Gregory claims, can find himself believing that he is facing terrible evils but this happens because in this state his soul is not guided by the intellect (168C). This evidence again raises the question about the nature of the intellect and how it relates to soul.

It becomes clear, however, that Gregory speaks of the intellect in two ways: as a power that permeates and unifies the entire human body; and as a faculty of the soul responsible for one psychic function, thinking (*De hom. opif.* 161AD, 168CD, respectively). These ways of speaking of the intellect correspond, roughly speaking, to the Stoic and the Platonic/Aristotelian conception of the intellect. I do not think there is tension between these two conceptions in Gregory. His concern with the unity of perception suggests to him that the intellect is not a faculty of the

soul, but rather the form of the body, as it were, since sense data are of a certain kind, namely of an intelligible or conceptual nature. On the other hand, however, phenomena such as dreams and hallucinations cannot be sufficiently explained with reference to the intellect as a form of the body or a power permeating the entire body, but they rather suggest that the intellect is not always properly operating in man, during sleep, for instance (*De hom. opif.* 168BC). While discussing psychological phenomena of this kind, Gregory treats the intellect as one faculty of the soul, not as the essence of the soul. In the former sense, the intellect accounts for the godlike nature of human beings. Gregory is also motivated here by ethical concerns. If we follow our nature, which is that of God, we cannot but do good. When we do not remain loyal to our intellect, we distance ourselves from God and wickedness arises, which is a kind of privation, the absence of our intellect (164A). The essential role of the intellect also serves Gregory in maintaining the unity of sense-perception.

I shall return to the status of the intellect in Chapter 5. Here I want to return to the question of knowledge. We have seen that for Gregory sense-perception does not occur in the sense organs but in the intellect, which operates through the senses. Gregory maintains that we can reach certainty in knowledge of the truly real being (*Vita Mosis*, 333C) and elsewhere speaks of “the truth of beings” (*On Fate*, PG 161D). It is far from clear what Gregory means by such phrases. If we look more carefully in the treatises where such phrases occur, we see that Gregory has a particular understanding of truth. He defines truth as the correct understanding of being.<sup>68</sup> Such a correct understanding of being can be achieved only with regard to what is unchanging and eternal. Like Aristotle (*Met.* V.2), Gregory identifies such a being with God, who is truth in itself (*Vita Mosis* 333C). When Gregory speaks of secure knowledge, then, he does not refer to the knowledge we obtain through the senses, but rather to the knowledge of God, who is real being, unchanging and eternal. Man can reach such knowledge through the unmediated activity of the intellect.<sup>69</sup> Sense-perception on the other hand provides knowledge that is mediated through the sense organs and concerns sensible beings that are subject to alteration. Sense-perception still has conceptual content and coherence, since it is ultimately achieved by the intellect, but it cannot have the clarity and certainty of the unmediated knowledge of the intellect itself.

## Conclusion

We have seen, then, that early Christians were quite well versed in logic in its various aspects. Clement embraces those aspects of logic, such as Aristotle’s categories, which can disarm the challenge of scepticism, which was flourishing at the time of Clement. Origen knows Stoic logic well enough to fend off Celsus’ criticisms and to support his own positions. Basil and Gregory’s criticism of Eunomius’ theory of names targets the latter’s assumptions about the rational nature of human beings. Gregory in particular sets out to show that human reason operates by means of concepts and that this ability is a God-given gift, thereby aiming to defend the

view that human beings are like God because we think in terms of concepts.<sup>70</sup> According to Gregory, we not only have the ability to conceive of external reality and attain knowledge of it, but we can also elaborate on our conceptions of that reality and come up with several conceptions of it. This, he suggests, characterizes human beings in general and is indicative of our distinctive cognitive ability; we are able to think conceptually and apply our concepts to the things around us and also to our initial concepts and thus generate further concepts. We do this when we invent things, when we engage in science or practise a skill, and when we create names for things or classify things in different ways. For Gregory the human invention of names provides a good example of the application of both human conceptual thinking and of the resourcefulness of our intellect. And this is in turn telling about the nature of the human intellect, which, as Gregory claims, is the essence of human sense in the sense that shapes also the human body, so that this can be in a relation of mutual interaction with our intellect.

## Notes

- 1 Cited by Walzer (1949: 14). See also the comments of Barnes (2012: 4–5).
- 2 Προστίθησι δὲ τούτοις [sc. Celsus] ὅτι κρίναι καὶ βεβαιώσασθαι καὶ ἀσκήσαι πρὸς ἀρετὴν τὰ ὑπὸ βαρβάρων εὐρεθέντα ἀμείνονες εἰσιν Ἕλληνας (And he adds to these that the Greeks are better in judging, proving, and using in accordance with virtue the inventions of the barbarians; *C. Cels.* I.2). The verb βεβαιοῦν is used in the sense “confirm, prove”, as in Plato, *Theaet.* 169e2 and in Aristotle, *N.E.* 1159a22, *Met.* 1008a17.
- 3 I maintain that Porphyry must be the author of this comment, because Eusebius targets Porphyry’s central claim in his *Preparation for the Gospel* that there is doctrinal harmony in the pagan philosophical tradition, arguing instead that there is deep division between pagan philosophers but that nonetheless the best of them, Plato and his followers, are in agreement about many important Christian doctrines. See Nestle (1948: 623–627).
- 4 See further Heimgartner (2001: 193–198, 221–224); Havrda (2012b: 262–263).
- 5 The title of one of the introductory chapters of the *PE.*, I.3, is this: “That we did not choose without examination to follow the doctrines of the word of salvation” (ὅτι μὴ ἀνεξέτάστως τὰ τοῦ σωτηρίου λόγου φρονεῖν εἰλόμεθα).
- 6 On this revival, see Gottschalk (1987), Barnes (1997b).
- 7 For a review of discussion regarding the order of logic and ethics in Aristotle’s work, see Karamanolis (2011).
- 8 *On the Order of My Own Books*, 41K. See Havrda (2015: 276–277), where the reader can find further illuminating discussion.
- 9 Galen himself provides us with the list in his *On the Order of My Own Books*. See further Morison (2008). On Galen’s treatise *On Demonstration* in particular, its aim and structure, see Havrda (2015).
- 10 Galen, *The Best Doctor is Also a Philosopher* 1.59–60, cited in Morison (2008: 69).
- 11 See Barnes (1997a), who collects and discusses the relevant evidence. I am grateful to Jonathan Barnes for his advice on this section.
- 12 Gellius speaks of the Aristotelian syllogism in *Noct. Att.* XV.26, XVI.8.
- 13 See Havrda (2012b) for a valuable discussion and further references.
- 14 Sextus, *PH.* II.15; *A.M.* VII.31–32; Galen, *PHP.* IX.1.11–13 De Lacy; I owe these references to Havrda (2012b: 273). See also Havrda (2016: 70–72).
- 15 ἦν μὴ τὸν κανόνα τῆς ἀληθείας παρ’ αὐτῆς λαβόντες ἔχουσι τῆς ἀληθείας (*Strom.* VII.16.94.5).
- 16 See also *Strom.* I.1.15.2, I.19.96.1; IV.1.3.2; for a discussion, see Havrda (2012b).

- 17 ἀπ' αὐτῶν περὶ αὐτῶν τῶν γραφῶν τελείως ἀποδεικνύοντες, ἐκ πίστεως πειθόμεθα ἀποδεικτικῶς (we draw from the Scriptures perfect proofs that concern the Scriptures themselves, we are convinced by faith in a demonstrative way) (*Strom.* VII.16.96.1). On this, see Havrda (2012b: 275).
- 18 See Plutarch, *De an. procr.* 1013B; Porphyry in Philoponus, *De aet. mundi* 521.25–522.9.
- 19 See further Havrda (2011b) and Chapter 4.
- 20 Eusebius (*PE.* I.3.7) also claims that God's testimony makes Christian faith perspicuous.
- 21 On the use of these terms by Clement, see Havrda (2012b: 269–270).
- 22 The main relevant testimonies are collected by Long and Sedley (1987) (LS), sections 17A, E (=D.L. 10.31–33) 40A, G (D.L. VII.54, Plutarch, *De communis notitiis* 1059B–C).
- 23 For a further discussion of these claims of Clement, see Havrda (2012b: 267–269).
- 24 Cicero claims to be drawing here on Epicurus' work *On Rule and Judgement*.
- 25 See further Karamanolis (2012).
- 26 For an overview of the modern debate of this book of *Stromateis*, starting with von Arnim (1894), see Havrda (2016: 11–25, 29–34).
- 27 This has been shown convincingly by Havrda (2011a; see also 2016: 34–50).
- 28 For Origen's argument against Celsus, see Chapter 1, pp. 40–41, 48–51. Eusebius' strategy against Porphyry can be best seen in his *Preparatio Evangelica*.
- 29 See Havrda (2015: 282–287).
- 30 See the discussion in Havrda (2016: 50–56).
- 31 στοιχεῖά τινα . . . ὑφ' ἃ πᾶν τὸ ζητούμενον ὑπάγεται (*Strom.* VIII.8.23.3). On the use of Aristotle's theory of categories by Clement, see Frede (2005: 143–145), Havrda (2012a; 2016: 246–262); Karamanolis (2017, 2021b). Aristotle's reception by early Christian philosophers has now been studied in detail by Edwards (2019).
- 32 τὰ καθ' ἕκαστα εἰς τὰ καθόλου ἀνάγεται (*Strom.* VIII.8.23.3).
- 33 τῶν δὲ μὴ μετὰ συμπλοκῆς λεγομένων τὰ μὲν οὐσίαν σημαίνει, τὰ δὲ ποῖον, τὰ δὲ ποσόν, τὰ δὲ πρὸς τι, τὰ δὲ ποῦ, τὰ δὲ ποτέ, τὰ δὲ κείσθαι, τὰ δὲ ἔχειν, τὰ δὲ ποιεῖν, τὰ δὲ πάσχειν, ἃ δὴ καὶ στοιχεῖα τῶν ὄντων φάμεν τῶν ἐν ὕλῃ καὶ μετὰ τὰς ἀρχάς, ἔστι γὰρ λόγῳ θεωρητὰ ταῦτα, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα νῶ μόνῳ ληπτὰ ἔστι κατὰ τὴν πρώτην ἐπιβολήν (*Strom.* VIII.8.23.6).
- 34 Τῶν γὰρ καθ' ἕκαστα ἀπειρῶν ὄντων μὴ εἶναι ἐπιστήμην, ἴδιον δὲ ἐπιστήμης καθολικῶς ἐπερίδραστοι θεωρήμασι καὶ ὀρισμένοις. ὅθεν τὰ καθ' ἕκαστα εἰς τὰ καθόλου ἀνάγεται. ἢ δὲ τῶν φιλοσόφων πραγματεία περὶ τε τὰ νοήματα καὶ τὰ ὑποκείμενα καταγίνεται. ἐπεὶ δὲ τούτων τὰ καθ' ἕκαστα ἄπειρα, στοιχεῖά τινα καὶ τούτων εὐρέθη, ὑφ' ἃ πᾶν τὸ ζητούμενον ὑπάγεται (*Strom.* VIII.8.23.2–3). Τούτων refers both to ὑποκείμενα πράγματα and νοήματα, that is, things and concepts.
- 35 See Alcinous, *Didask.* 155.39–42; Alexander, *De anima* 66.16–19; Plotinus, *Enn.* V.8.1. For a discussion of this part of Clement's *Stromateis*, see Havrda (2016: 252–253).
- 36 I draw here on Karamanolis (2021b). See also Havrda (2016: 249, 251).
- 37 Clement speaks of two classes of general kinds under which things fall – things in themselves, namely substances; and things in relation, that is, all other categories (*Strom.* VIII.8.24.1) – as well as mentioning five classes of names of things – synonyms, heteronyms, polyonyms, paronyms, and homonyms. See the discussion in Havrda (2016: 255–262).
- 38 *Est enim logice haec vel, ut nos dicimus, rationalis, quae verborum dictorumque videtur continere rationes proprietatesque et improprietates, generaque et species, et figuras singulorum quonumque edocere dictorum, quam utique disciplinam non tam separari quam inseri ceteris convenit et intexi.* (*Comm. on the Song of Songs* prol. 3.2). See further I. Hadot (1987: 117). In *Homilies in Genesis* (IV.3.39), though, Origen accepts logic as part of philosophy.
- 39 *Oratio Panegyrica in Origenem* 7.99–115. Cf. *C. Cels.* I.2 on satisfying the Greek demands of *apodeixis*. On this, see Koch (1932: 248–258, 301–305) and also Somos (2015).
- 40 *Letter to Gregory Thaumaturgos* 1, PG 11, 88. Cf. Clement's claim that the sciences corroborate philosophy (*Strom.* VI.11.90.1–91.1) and the discussion in Hadot (1984: 287–289).



- 41 See Chadwick (1947: 34–48); Roberts (1970: 433–444); Rist (1981).
- 42 ἐὰν δὲ τις ἀνθυποφέρῃ πρὸς ταῦτα, εἰ δυνατόν ἐστι μὴ γενέσθαι ἃ τοιάδε ἔσεσθαι προεγίνωσκεν ὁ θεός, φήσομεν ὅτι δυνατόν μὲν μὴ γενέσθαι. οὐχὶ δέ, εἰ δυνατόν μὴ γενέσθαι, ἀνάγκη μὴ γενέσθαι ἢ γενέσθαι (And if someone objects to these claims whether it might be possible that the kinds of things that God has predicted do not happen, we claim that it is possible. It is not the case, however, that if something is possible to happen that it happen or not happen necessarily; Origen, *Philokalia* ch. 25.2; SC 226: 220). I read δυνατόν following E. Junod, the editor of *Sources Chrétiennes*, against the manuscript variant ἀδύνατον, which is not justified by what follows in the text.
- 43 This is how Diogenes Laertius (VII.75) defines a non-necessary proposition.
- 44 This passage is evidence for the Stoic theory of conditionals along with Sextus, *PH*. II.1.3; Galen, *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* II.3 De Lacy (*SVF* II.248); see LS 36F and the discussion in Roberts (1970); Rist (1981: 73–76).
- 45 βιάζεσθαι θέλων τὴν τῆς ἀλήθειας ἐνάργειαν ὡς οὐκ ἀλήθειαν (wanting to distort the perspicuity of truth as if it is not truth; *C. Cels.* VII.14). Origen often uses this method in his *C. Celsum* to render the critics' arguments impossible. See Roberts (1970: 442).
- 46 Roberts (1970: 443).
- 47 Crucial in this regard is Porphyry, *In Ptol. Harm.* 12.10–20; cf. Porphyry, *In Cat.* 90.31–91.7; Simplicius, *In Cat.* 10.17–19; Porphyry fr. 46 Smith.
- 48 I elaborate on this in Karamanolis (2021b).
- 49 For a reconstruction of the controversy, see Vaggione (1987: xiv–xvii), who also collects the fragments of Eunomius.
- 50 On this issue, see Daniélou (1956); Karfikova (2007); and especially the fine treatment of DelCogliano (2010).
- 51 On this issue, see further Karfikova (2007).
- 52 See Daniélou (1956) and Karfikova (2000: 53–61). See now DelCogliano (2010: 49–95), who criticizes Daniélou's reading and Radde-Gallwitz (2018b: 206–207), who reviews the scholarly debate and shows convincingly that rather Gregory's language is substantively shaped by the *Cratylus*.
- 53 See Robertson (2002: 190–191).
- 54 This position is maintained also in Latin Christianity and especially by Augustine, as Denecker (2017) shows.
- 55 For an account of Eunomius' theory of names, see DelCogliano (2010: 39–42).
- 56 Basil, *C. Eun.* II.29.13–24; Gregory, *C. Eun.* II.148, GNO 268.18–24; II.163–4, GNO 272.16–30. On this topic see Radde-Gallwitz (2009: 154–218).
- 57 On this, see DelCogliano (2010: 135–140).
- 58 See further Edwards (2019: 102–105).
- 59 Cf. Sextus, *A.M.* IX.393–402.
- 60 Alexander, for instance, argues that mathematical entities exist only in *epinoia*, in thought: Τὰ δὲ μαθηματικὰ τὴν ἐν τοῖς πολλοῖς, τουτέστι τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς καὶ τοῖς καθ' ἕκαστα δηλοῦν ὁμοίότητα ἐνυπάρχοντα τούτοις. οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν αὐτὰ καθ' αὐτὰ ὑφεστῶτα, ἀλλ' ἐπινοία (Alexander, *In Metaphysica* 52.13–16; CAG I). David, *In Porphyrii Isagogen* 119.17–24 (CAG XVIII 2) distinguishes further between *epinoia* and *psilê epinoia*, namely the thought of things that are only fantasies and exist only in the mind.
- 61 On this, see Sieben (1998) and Radde-Gallwitz (2009: 143–154, 177–182).
- 62 *In Joh.* I.28, 200; *Princ.* IV.4.1. See the discussion in Karamanolis (2021b).
- 63 *In Joh.* II.23, 148.
- 64 Here I draw on Karamanolis (2021b).
- 65 For a discussion of these passages of Basil, see Radde-Gallwitz (2010: 22–24).
- 66 On Basil's argument against Eunomius' theory of names, see DelCogliano (2010) and Radde-Gallwitz (2009: 143–174).

- 67 For a discussion of this section in *Theaetetus*, see Cooper (1970).
- 68 Τοῦτο δέ ἐστι, κατὰ τὸν ἐμὸν λόγον, ὀρισμὸς ἀληθείας τὸ μὴ διαψευσθῆναι τῆς τοῦ ὄντος κατανοήσεως . . . ἀλήθεια δὲ ἢ τοῦ ὄντως ὄντος ἀσφαλῆς κατανόησις (This is, in my view, the definition of truth, namely not to fail in understanding being . . . truth is the secure understanding of being; *Vita Mosis* 333A).
- 69 See further on Gregory's conception of truth in Aldaz (2010).
- 70 For a more extensive presentation of Gregory's philosophy of human nature or anthropology, as it is often called, see Zachhuber (2000).

# 4

## FREE WILL AND DIVINE PROVIDENCE

### Introduction

The issues of free will, human responsibility, and divine providence concerned early Christian philosophers as deeply as they did their Hellenic contemporaries, Epicurus, Alexander, Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus. By the time of Justin Martyr, Christians were already exhibiting a strong interest in this network of issues. Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria seriously engaged with these issues, as they were eager to oppose the relevant Gnostic (Valentinian and Basilidean) view, according to which free will pertains only to one class of human beings, and indeed not the best one. The Christian interest in free will reaches its peak in the work of Origen, who advances a highly sophisticated theory. Unlike other parts of Origen's philosophy, this theory was fully embraced by Basil and Gregory of Nyssa, who developed it further. And the question is what triggered this debate and made this network of issues so prominent in the thought of early Christians.

This question permits many different answers. One possible answer is the following: the question of human free will – that is, the question of whether we are free to choose a course of action – is crucial for deciding how man relates to God and to the world and how God relates to man and the world. As we have seen in Chapter 2, the notion of free will emerges already in the Christian discussion of cosmogony. Was God free to make the world as he wished, or was he constrained by external exigencies, such as those set by matter, as is the case in the *Timaeus*, for instance? God's freedom of choice is especially important because man is, according to Scripture, created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26), which means that if God's freedom of will is limited, then so is man's.

Most Christian thinkers who set out to explain how God created the world emphasize God's will (*boulēma*, *voluntas*) to do so and underscore God's unconstrained freedom. The reason for this emphasis is that they consider freedom an

essential element of their Christian concept of God, for, if God's will is constrained in any way, this would undermine God's status as an omnipotent being. Let me explain this in detail.

If God's decision to create the world was not the product of a freely made choice, then the world would be a product of necessity. This would mean that it was not God's goodness that accounts for it completely but some kind of necessity, and this would further entail that God's goodness did not prevail in the world. Even if God's decision to create was not necessary but he was nevertheless constrained by external exigencies, such as those set by matter, this would still undermine God's omnipotence along with the world's goodness and would affirm the superiority of matter, which was often considered responsible for the bad features of the world. On such a view, which was held by Hermogenes for instance, the creator God is neither entirely free to act nor powerful enough to impose his choice. We have seen (Ch. 2, pp. 71–73) that Tertullian criticized this view as incompatible with the notion of God which he takes as implying absolute freedom of choice.

Before delving deeper into the problem, let me first point out that contemporary Platonists entertained similar considerations, given that the divine creator of the *Timaeus* collaborates with, and is constrained by, necessity (*anagkē*; *Tim.* 47e–48b).<sup>1</sup> The receptacle where the material elements of the world are shaped and which exists independently of the demiurge is a necessary condition for the creation of the world (*Tim.* 53ab). Some Platonists in late antiquity thought that the demiurge cannot be the highest or the ultimate principle of the world, exactly because they assumed that such a principle should be free of all constraints, and this is not the case with the demiurge of the *Timaeus*; he has to convince and collaborate with necessity in order to bring about the world (*Tim.* 48a, 51e). Besides, the demiurge needs the Forms in order to create, which again shows that he is not self-sufficient. Platonists tried to eliminate this difficulty by arguing that the Forms are hosted in the divine intellect as thoughts (cf. *Tim.* 39e; see Numenius fr. 18 Des Places; Alcinous, *Didasc.* 164.28–31), but this in turn leads to a new problem: the demiurge is thus rendered a complex entity and complexity undermines unity. This would be a problem because God needs to be an ultimate, utterly simple unity in order to qualify as a principle of the world's unity. Such considerations led Platonists such as Numenius and Plotinus to postulate a God higher than the demiurge, the first God of Numenius or the One in Plotinus' terms, who allegedly figures in the second part of Plato's *Parmenides*. An essential feature of this principle is its absolute freedom of will, as we learn from Plotinus' *Ennead* VI.8, which bears the title (given by Porphyry) "On the Voluntary and the Will of the One" (*Peri tou hekousiou kai tou boulēmatos tou henos*). Plotinus claims that the creation is the result of the will of the highest God (the Good), who realizes his will without any hindrance and whose will is his essence.<sup>2</sup> The Christians were advocating the same idea with increasing emphasis.

One strategy attempted by the early Christians, alongside contemporary pagan Platonists, was to defend monism, that is, to rule out matter as a cosmic principle and make God alone responsible for creation. But, as we saw in Chapter 2, the

problem persists, since there remains the question of how evil or wickedness can be explained in the world if God is the only principle. There was a good deal of pressure to come up with a clear answer to this question, because, as I explained in Chapter 2, there was a strong tendency in late antiquity, overtly manifested in some branches of Gnosticism, to believe that the creator of the world, the God of the Old Testament, was a malevolent and incompetent one, who set up the world in such a way that it is deficient or bad. This wickedness would allegedly manifest itself in natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, volcanic eruptions, and accidents that befall humans and disorder or end their lives. Even if one explains away such cases by arguing, as Stoics and Peripatetics did, that such instances are not indications of disorder but ultimately contribute to the overall harmony of the world,<sup>3</sup> there was one kind of wickedness that required special explanation, namely human vice, which occurs in various degrees ranging from occasional wrongdoing to deliberate and systematic viciousness. The question was how human vice is possible if the world was created good by a good creator. This was a problem for Christians and pagans alike, but it was particularly acute for the former, because they believed that man is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). Both early Christians and pagans, however, had to face the challenge of two main contemporary currents of thought, namely that of astral determinists and the Gnostics. Their challenge concerned a wide area of philosophical issues.

Astral determinism goes back to the Hellenistic age and was still prevalent in the second century CE, as we can tell from the many contemporary criticisms directed against it.<sup>4</sup> Sextus Empiricus writes against the views of the astrologists and about a century later Plotinus dedicates an entire treatise to this issue.<sup>5</sup> Astral determinists defended the view that our choices, our characters, and our lives are essentially determined by the movements of the stars. On such a view, God would clearly have allowed for the existing state of affairs or even desired it. On the other hand, according to the Valentinian Gnostics, God, that is, the God of the Old Testament, created the world without goodness, that is, without regard for his creatures. In their view, God determined people's characters and lives, privileging some above others. Early Christian sources report that Valentinians spoke of three classes of human beings that God created: those who are destined to enjoy salvation, those destined to perish, and those in between who have the power to go either way and are thus the only ones who have the power to choose.<sup>6</sup> The choices of those in the first two classes cannot make any difference with regard to their happiness and salvation, since for them everything is predetermined.

Early Christian thinkers were concerned with refuting both views, those of the astral determinists and those of Valentinian Gnostics, who were themselves fellow Christians. The reason for their concern was mainly that such views severely distorted the way God relates to man and to the world. The argument of early Christian thinkers was, however, beset with great difficulties for two main reasons. First, Scripture does not contain an explicit discussion of those issues but only some hints, such as when Jesus says that he wishes he could avoid suffering but follows the will of his Father (*thelēma*; Luke 22:42; Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:36); or

in the same context Jesus' remark that man's spirit is willing but the body is weak (Matthew 26:41, Mark 14:38); or, famously, Paul's statement in his Letter to the Romans that he observes a law at work in his members unlike the one in his mind (Romans 7:19–24). Yet Paul does not further explain further how this is possible and how, if at all, it is possible for man to freely choose instead of being carried away by his desires. Scripture not only lacks a discussion of all the important issues in this area but also lacks the relevant terminology which early Christians employ in their writings. In particular, I have in mind the terms *to eph' hemin* (τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῶν), *prohairesis* (προαίρεσις), and *autexousion* (αὐτεξούσιον). The pressing question is how early Christians came up with these concepts and the corresponding terms.

All three terms are of Stoic provenance. The term *to eph' hemin* indicates that which depends on us, that is, man's unconstrained capacity of assessing and choosing.<sup>7</sup> As I will explain in the next section, the Stoic idea is that humans have the capacity to assess their impressions and decide how to deal with them while non-rational animals lack such an ability and impulsive impressions fully determine their actions. This is especially strongly conveyed by the term *prohairesis*. Aristotle uses this term in the sense of "choice" in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (III.1), but the same term is used in a special sense by the Stoic Epictetus. For him *prohairesis* is a critical disposition or power to deal with our impressions, namely the power to choose whether we would assent to them or not. For Epictetus, then, *prohairesis* is not a choice in the same sense that it was for Aristotle but, as I will explain in more detail below, rather a willingness or ability to choose rationally. In this sense the term is closer to what we would call "will" today.<sup>8</sup> For Epictetus this ability is the most distinctive human feature; therefore, he suggests that this is man's real self.<sup>9</sup> Finally, the term *autexousion*, which is also a Stoic provenance, signifies the agent's power or authority (*exousia*) to make choices and exert authority over oneself. In this sense the term signifies what we would today call "autonomy".<sup>10</sup>

The second difficulty that beset the theoretical work of early Christians was the need to go beyond a mere criticism of determinist theories, such as those of the astral determinists or the Gnostics, and to articulate an alternative Christian theory of human agency that would be plausible as well as sufficiently sophisticated. This kind of theory would need, for instance, to address the question of theodicy, of how God as the sole principle of the world is just given the considerable differences between individuals in terms of talents, temperaments, and propensities. The Gnostics had an explanation, claiming that God created the world with no regard for his creatures and without goodness, privileging only a select few in all possible ways. As a result, they claimed, some men are well constituted and greatly endowed – intellectually, physically, or both – while others are not. The former are destined to do well in their lives and finally enjoy salvation, while the rest are destined to fail. There is also a third class of people, those who can potentially attain salvation. According to Valentinus, only the people of this class have the power to choose; they are the only ones who can either succeed or fail in achieving salvation (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I.6.1–2, I.8.3).<sup>11</sup> The choices of all the others, he claimed, cannot make any difference with regard to salvation, as everything is predetermined for

them. Quite remarkably, for Valentinus the power to choose is an option inferior to that of being destined to succeed, because it is the same power which can also lead to failure. In this sense the power to choose is not a privilege.

The Valentinian worldview is unappealing but not entirely implausible. It is not entirely implausible because it is an empirical fact that humans vary considerably in terms of talents and natural constitutions for which they are not responsible but which, at least partly, determine success in life. It is, however, unappealing because it makes the world grossly unfair. This combination of characteristics explains why Christians and non-Christians alike were concerned by the Gnostic view. Both early Christians and Hellenic philosophers such as Plotinus reacted against it, taking it as a view that goes against the foundations of classical culture and philosophy, which are, I take it, that success in life is not a gift of God granted to a few select people but a matter of intense training, reflection, and choice, and thus possible for everyone. Philosophers in antiquity had always stressed that a happy life depends, crucially or even solely, on virtue, which is the product of the rule of reason. Plato in his mature dialogues such as the *Republic* and Aristotle in his ethics insisted on the importance of educating the non-rational part of the soul so that it always acts in accordance with reason, claiming that in this way we build virtuous characters that consequently determine our future choices.<sup>12</sup> Virtue consists in their view precisely in the dominance of reason over non-rational desires, and this is essential for achieving happiness. Plato, and especially Aristotle, might well have conceded that there are people with handicaps and that may undermine the achievement of virtue and happiness, and at any rate only the free citizen is fully capable of attaining happiness (women, barbarians, slaves are excluded). Yet for the Valentinians it is the divine structure of the world that accounts for such differences among people. If this is so, then the Valentinian view cannot be disarmed without combating its theological underpinnings.

One strategy that early Christian philosophers employ against the Valentinian view is to attack its theological assumptions. They argue that only God's goodness can adequately explain the world as it is. On this view, the only plausible reason for why God could have wanted to create the world was to fill it with goodness and to grant that goodness to mankind, that is, in order to bring salvation to mankind. If God created us as puppets with no power to determine our lives, as the Valentinians suggested, it is difficult to see why God created us at all, unless he wished to observe an especially vicious form of entertainment. But such a motivation is not worthy of God. As we saw in Chapter 2, Christians conceived of God as reason, and in their view reason is inextricably connected with goodness (see pp. 68–69). As the perfection of reason, God must be perfectly good as well as beneficent. God's creation of humans who are destined to fail in their lives is at odds with that conception. Another strategy used against the Gnostics was to focus on human nature, arguing that man's rationality entails that we are able to choose as God does, since we are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). If this is not the case, it is difficult to see how God is justified to judge, reward, or punish humans.

However, the main thrust against the Gnostic thesis was the argument that their thesis was badly incoherent. According to this argument, which we mainly find in Irenaeus (see below, pp. 144–146), it is not at all clear according to which criterion God privileges some people over others and why he grants some people the ability of self-determination and denies it to others, as the Valentinians claimed. This cannot be done at random, because God does everything for a reason given his supremely rational nature. The Valentinians fail to mention what that reason might be. If they rely on Paul's statements in his Letter to the Romans (9:18–21), according to which God made people different in the same way that the potter makes some clay vessels for special use and others for common use, they face the problem that no reason is cited there for God's differing treatment. It is difficult to imagine such a reason, which means that Paul's passage cannot imply that God operates with a favouritism of the Gnostic kind.<sup>13</sup> For, if God favours some people, it is difficult to see in what sense these persons can be considered praiseworthy. It is indeed difficult to even see in what sense they can be considered good, if being good means, strictly speaking, making good use of reason.

The criticism of Valentinian determinism was not an easy task, however. The challenge posed by the Valentinian position could not be overcome only by means of criticism; it would also require the formulation of a complete alternative theory. Christian philosophers, such as Justin Martyr, Theophilus, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement, tried to offer such a theory. It was Origen, however, who fully appreciated the dimensions of this issue and developed an alternative Christian theory of human action opposed to the Valentinian view on the one hand, while, on the other hand, addressing the question of theodicy, namely how God, as the sole principle of the world, accounts for individual differences in human constitutions. Origen's theory was further developed by Nemesius and the Cappadocians. Both the Valentinians and their critics, however, operate with a notion of will and its freedom that does not come from the Scriptures, as I have said. We need to see exactly what this notion is, how it came into being, and what the relevant terminology suggests. I will consider this in the following section.

## The notion of will and its freedom before the Christians

The notions of will and of freedom we find in Christian philosophers surfaced in the Hellenistic philosophical schools, in Epicureanism and Stoicism.<sup>14</sup> The Christians did not simply inherit these notions; they rather took up a complex set of views on human agency and on God's providence that were connected with them. In order to understand the relevant Christian conceptual horizon, we first need to appreciate the intellectual framework from which it drew inspiration.

Let me begin with a preliminary remark: the notion of will is not necessary for explaining human action, as we tend to think today in the wake of post-Kantian philosophy. I side with those who believe that this notion is conspicuously absent from Plato and Aristotle, to say nothing of the Presocratics.<sup>15</sup> That does not mean that they lack this idea; rather, their theory of action is such that there is no need



to resort to such a notion. Plato and Aristotle, leaving differences aside for the moment, share the view that humans have two kinds of desire (*orexis*): rational desires or desires of reason (*boulēsis*) and non-rational desires (*epithymia*), such as those of appetite, desire to eat or to drink, for instance. When reason and appetite conflict, man is not really in two minds, so to speak, about the course of action one would pursue. Rather, as Aristotle makes abundantly clear, one needs to decide whether to stand by his rational desire, which represents his real choice, or not (*N.E.* III.6). For Aristotle, man does not actually choose in those instances when he acts against his own rational choice but rather fails to stand by it (*N.E.* 1113a16–18). This happens because one has not been trained or educated well enough, which should ideally result in one's never failing to pursue his or her rational choice. On this view, the agent does not choose every time she decides to do something. Neither is she ever torn between two choices, one of which she freely chooses – to eat or abstain from eating a piece of cake, for instance. The freedom rather consists in not hesitating at all to adhere to the desire of reason or the choice which was there all along. Hence, this is not called “freedom”, nor does it amount to freedom, because the idea is that one should not aim to be “free” to choose whatever she may like at any time, but rather to choose to abide with her rational choice. It is then reason that chooses, not will, and it is also reason that fails to choose, depending on whether one stands by it or abandons it. Given this strict sense of “choosing” and “choice” and the corresponding theory of human action that Plato and especially Aristotle have, there is no need for them to have a notion of will, let alone one of free will.

These notions emerge in the Hellenistic schools. The social and political changes may have played a role in this development. In the Hellenistic era the city-state was replaced by vast empires run by the successors of Alexander, in which ordinary people were alienated from political power and had no control over the political decisions or the cosmic events that affected their lives. This situation may explain, at least partly, why Hellenistic philosophers adopted a cosmic perspective, already taken in the *Timaeus*, in their philosophical theories; they viewed man not as a member of a city, as Plato and Aristotle did, but rather as a part of the universe, the *kosmos*. While for the Epicureans the universe is set up by the motions of atoms alone and gods plays hardly any role in its making, for the Stoics God is the active cause of the universe, that is, the cause that shapes the world and everything in it, while matter is the passive cause.<sup>16</sup> The Stoic God is not transcendent, as is the demiurge of Plato's *Timaeus*, for instance, let alone the Form of the Good in the *Republic*, but immanent in the world and of corporeal nature. Through his presence in the world, the Stoic God determines things down to the smallest detail and providentially maintains the world, as he is good, like the God of Plato and Aristotle.<sup>17</sup> On the Stoic view, then, we live in a universe permeated and determined by God, and yet, the Stoics claim, we have the power to choose. It is against this background that the Stoics come to speak of man's will. Their rationale, which influenced Christian thinking, is roughly the following.

For the Stoics God has arranged the world in such a way that man develops to a rational being in maturity, going first through the developmental stages of a plant (when in the mother's womb), then as a child that of an animal (Plutarch, *De stoic. rep.* 1052; *SVF* II.806). The growth of reason in man amounts to the formation of concepts by means of which we perceive the world and communicate our thoughts (Cicero, *De fin.* III.20–22). Of course, this also takes place in childhood to some extent and there is, no doubt, a gradual development from childhood to maturity in the Stoic view (Aetius IV.11; *SVF* II.83). The Stoics insist, however, that when the development of reason is completed, a transformation takes place in the way we perceive by means of our senses. They suggest that at that stage our sense impressions are shaped by reason in that they are given conceptual and propositional content (Cicero, *Acad.* II.30–31). They further claim that these impressions are handled by reason alone (D.L. VII.51; *SVF* II.61, Sextus, *A.M.* VII.242; *SVF* II.65). The Stoics maintain that the non-rational part of the soul, from which non-rational desires arise in childhood, completely disappears when we become rational. This is why the Stoics call “commanding” (*hēgemonikon*) the main, rational, part of the soul, on which all other faculties depend for their operation (Aetius IV.21; *SVF* II.836).<sup>18</sup> Once reason is established, they claim, man is completely and irreversibly transformed into a rational being, in the same way that man is irreversibly transformed from plant to animal at birth. This means that there is no way for the mature human being to form and handle sense impressions by means other than reason, unless one purposefully precludes that process (e.g. by taking drugs), which again involves a rational decision (D.L. VII.159; *SVF* II.837). It was one of Zeno's innovations to argue that all our impressions (*phantasiai*) are subject to the control of reason, an operation which he called “assent” (*sygkatathesis*). No impression can make us do anything without our assent.<sup>19</sup> For the Stoics, then, all our choices are choices made by reason, not only according to reason, as Plato and Aristotle claimed, for the Stoics take the mature human soul to solely be reason.

The fact that for the Stoics all our choices are choices of reason does not, however, mean that they are always correct; our reason judges the impressions from the external world in accordance with the beliefs we hold, and these can be false. We would never be tempted by, let alone give into, eating a cake, for instance, unless we believe that it is sweet and good for us. The presence of a cake in a room does not entail an action on our part, such as eating it. It is our beliefs about it that entail an action, such as the belief that the cake is sweet and pleasant. Moreover, our beliefs play a key role in shaping a sense impression. We see something as “sweet” because we believe, when we see it, that it is sweet. Our desire to eat a piece of cake stems from similar beliefs and in this sense from a rational desire. Hence for the Stoics any desire we have is rational insofar as it is shaped by reason, that is, by the beliefs we have (*SVF* II.458, 462, 847, 839). The course of action we choose is also decided by reason, namely by the network of beliefs that we have accumulated in our lives. In this sense, the Stoics claim, the choice of one or the other course of action remains up to us (*eph' hēmīn*). It is not up to us to realize our choice, but only to choose to act, because factors external to us may prevent us from acting

in the way we have decided. The choice about how to act, however, remains our own. Such a choice involves an examination of our sense impressions, because, as I have mentioned, reason comes to a decision only after an investigation of sense impressions, which it shapes as well.

The Stoics, especially Epictetus, urge us to conduct this investigation in the best possible way, since this is the only thing that we can do. Epictetus calls this critical disposition towards our impressions *prohairesis* (*Disc.* I.4.18–21, I.17.21–8, II.2.1–7, 2.18.19–25); *prohairesis* is not itself a choice but rather a willingness or a desire to choose.<sup>20</sup> More precisely, it is a critical disposition or power over the impressions by means of which we choose. For Epictetus this power or disposition is the only thing we can actually choose and the only thing that cannot be hindered or harmed (*Disc.* II.9.2). This thing that cannot be taken from us is according to Epictetus man's real self; he calls it "me".<sup>21</sup> Epictetus is strikingly direct on this point: "You are neither flesh nor hair but *prohairesis*; if you render that virtuous, then you will be virtuous" (*Disc.* III.1.40).<sup>22</sup> For Epictetus a human being is his or her *prohairesis*, which we can call volition or will.<sup>23</sup> This is a concept that we do not find in either Plato or Aristotle, although, they do, of course, speak of choices of action or even choices of kinds of lives (of pleasure or of wisdom), as Plato does in *Republic* X. It was precisely this idea, the *prohairesis*, the willingness to choose, that was crucial to early Christians.

Early Christians speak extensively, as we shall see, about the power that impressions can have over us and about how we ought to deal with them. They do not speak only of sense impressions but also of mental impressions, which draw on sense impressions yet are constructions of the mind, like those we have when we dream. Some of these impressions come to us because they are stirred up by bodily desires. But, however all these impressions arise, for the Christians they are shaped and handled by reason; it is for this reason that Christians call them *logismoi*, thoughts. Such thoughts are what Christians would call temptations (Matthew 26:41; Mark 14:38). Since temptations are thoughts, Christians suggest that we should examine them critically, and we are in a position to do so, they claim, because of our will, our *prohairesis*.<sup>24</sup> Their notion of will is, I suggest, the one we find in Epictetus.<sup>25</sup>

Freedom of will now is a specific use of will. The Stoics speak of freedom (*eleutheria*) in the sense of the ability one has to act on his or her own account (*exousia autopraxis*), while slavery amounts to lacking this ability.<sup>26</sup> They further add that the wise have this ability, while the foolish lack it. The question, of course, is what exactly amounts to having or lacking this ability.

The Stoics claim that to have this ability amounts to being in a position to know what is good and what is bad (D.L. VII.121–2; LS 67M). And, in order to be in that position, we must have the right beliefs by means of which we can discern what is good. For the Stoics what is good is only what is universally beneficial, and the only such thing is virtue (D.L. VII.101; *SVF* III.30). Things such as health, beauty, wealth, fame, and so on, which are presumed to be good, are not considered good by the Stoics (Cicero, *De fin.* III.44, 50–53), because, as Socrates had

already pointed out in Plato's *Euthydemus* 278e–281e, they can be used for either good or bad purposes, depending on the knowledge and the motivation of whoever possesses them. Virtue, instead, the Stoics maintain, is always good because it is a form of knowledge or wisdom, which is always beneficial (*De fin.* III.28–34). When man has knowledge, he seeks what is good; when he lacks knowledge, he seeks things that appear to be good in the belief that they are good while they are in fact not, as suggested in *Protagoras* (356ce). This for the Stoics amounts to being enslaved by our beliefs in a way similar to being the slave of a tyrant, while to be free is like being a king (D.L. VII.121–122; LS 67M, *De fin.* III.74–75). One is enslaved when one is guided by false beliefs leading her to seek what only appears to be good, while the one with knowledge or wisdom never seeks things other than the good itself, which is virtue; in this sense one always remains free (*SVF* III.362–365). While the wise man is free, all others are slaves (D.L. VII.33; *SVF* I.122, III.591–3). The exercise of free will, then, consists for the Stoics in one's disposition to remain unconstrained by false beliefs and committed to virtue, the only good. This amounts to correctly judging which impressions accord with the good and which not.<sup>27</sup>

This is the notion of free will that the Christians take up from the Stoics. Christian thinkers find the Stoic notion of free will attractive because they share several Stoic theological assumptions, such as the view that God permeates the world and maintains it and that man is created rational and intellectual, like God (Cicero, *De legibus* I.22; *SVF* III.339, *De nat. deor.* II.73–87). Since the Stoics identify God with nature and reason and further identify reason with goodness, it is an aspect of God's providential arrangement of the world that man is in command of his choices, while all other natural animals are motivated by their nature alone, which determines their actions as well (Cicero, *De nat. deor.* II.147). While it is, for instance, simple enough to predict what a hungry lion would do when presented with a deer, the actions of a hungry man presented with food are not similarly predictable. For the Stoics this means that man is constituted so that he, and not nature, can be the author of his acts. To the extent that man chooses, he can opt for goodness, and in this sense man is made in the likeness of God, the Stoics claim. Therefore humans can cooperate with God in maintaining the goodness of the world (*SVF* III.335–337). This happens when man exercises his free will, that is, when he is guided by the right beliefs. When this does not happen, the divine plan is not disturbed, because God can arrange things so that the cosmic goodness is still maintained (*SVF* III.335). Human decisions and actions can, however, make the world a better or a worse place.

Christians are attracted by the Stoic notion of free will because it affirms a number of beliefs found in Scripture, such as the goodness of God and of the created world and man's being made in the image of God and his ability to be like God if he makes correct use of reason. Of course, we find similar beliefs in Plato along with the belief that God brought the world into being, something that the Stoics deny. A key element of the Stoic doctrine in the eyes of the Christians must have been that the source of wickedness was not considered to lie in any particular

cosmic element, such as matter (as some Platonists suggested), or a bad creator (as the Gnostics claimed), but rather in human false beliefs. For the Stoics wickedness enters the world exclusively via man's failure to stand by the good. It is indicative of the philosophical diligence of the Christians that they side with the more promising suggestion here: that of the Stoics.

However, the Christians do not fully side with the Stoics. Rather, at the very beginning of Christian philosophy the notion of free will is invoked in a polemical argument directed against the Stoics themselves. This is because the Stoics maintained that everything that happens in the world is determined by divine providence, which they also call fate (*eimarmenē*; *SVF* II.913–925). The Stoics understand fate as reason in its causal aspect, as divine providence that rules and determines everything in the world.<sup>28</sup> The Stoics nonetheless suggest that man can choose freely, given man's *prohairesis*, but the combination of our beliefs and the external circumstances necessarily leads to certain results. The Stoics distinguish two kinds of causes – sustaining or complete, and preliminary or auxiliary causes – and they use the analogy of the cylinder and the cone to illustrate them.<sup>29</sup> The force we apply to a cylinder and to a cone is external to them, much like the impressions we receive, but their consequent movement, their rolling or not, is due to the shape of the cylinder and the cone, which the Stoics compare to our character.<sup>30</sup> Our character, like the shape of the cylinder, is the sustaining cause, while sense impressions are the auxiliary cause, like the external impetus. A certain outcome is fated by the combination of human character with other factors of the causal network, yet for the Stoics this does not mean that one's choice is determined because man alone is responsible for his beliefs. Early Christian thinkers, starting with Justin, set out to oppose this view, which they considered deterministic. In doing so, they seem to be drawing on relevant Platonist and Peripatetic anti-Stoic arguments, such as those of Alexander of Aphrodisias.

### **The first traces of a Christian theory of free will: Justin, Tatian, and Theophilus**

Justin is the first Christian philosopher who seriously engages with the issues of free choice and human responsibility. In his first *Apology* he sets out to address the view that everything that happens in the world is predetermined on the grounds that God knows everything in advance and has set up the world in a certain way.<sup>31</sup> Justin addresses that view in the context of his discussion of the prophecies of the Old Testament about Jesus, which on the one hand point to the divinity of Jesus, yet on the other raise the question of whether divine foreknowledge only predicts the future or also determines it (1 *Apol.* 43.1). If the latter is the case, as many Gnostics maintained, then God determines future events, in particular events in our own lives regardless of our choices. If this thesis is valid, Justin argues, then nothing is up to us (*eph' hēmin*); and if this is the case and one person is destined to be good and another evil, then there is no justification whatsoever

for any judgement, for blame or praise (43.2). In addition, Justin puts forth the following argument:

If mankind does not have the power to avoid the evils (*ta aischra*) and choose the goods in virtue of our ability to choose freely (*prohairesei eleutheraî*), then all actions whatsoever are without cause (*anaition*). But that it is by the ability to choose freely that we act rightly or wrongly we demonstrate in the following way. We see that the same man does opposite things. If it were fated (*heimarto*) that a man were either wicked or virtuous, he would not be capable (*dektikos*) of opposites nor would he have changed his mind so many times. Neither would some be virtuous and some wicked, since we would then be making fate (*heimarmenē*) the cause of evil and exhibit her as acting in opposition to herself, unless what has been said above is true, namely that there is no virtue and vice but that good and evil things are only matters of opinion. And this, as the true account (*logos*) shows, is the greatest impiety and injustice. We claim, though, that the inevitable fate (*heimarmenēn aparavaton*) consists in the reward of those who choose the good and similarly in the fair punishment of those who choose the opposite.

(1 *Apol.* 43.3–7)

Justin comes to the conclusion that man, unlike all other living creatures, plants, or animals, is created by God with the ability to choose (*prohairesis*), and this is why he is worthy of praise or blame (1 *Apol.* 43.8). This is a point that Justin repeats in many other sections of his work.<sup>32</sup> In these passages Justin does not use the term *prohairesis* in the sense of “choice”, as Aristotle does, but rather in the sense of “an ability that enables choice”, as Epictetus does. In the passage cited above Justin puts forth an argument for the existence of *eleuthera prohairesis*, which rests on the claim that the choices of the same agent often vary and can be even opposed to each other, as we often change our minds and opt for a course of action we had previously rejected.<sup>33</sup> Sometimes, for instance, the same person withholds her anger while at other times letting it burst out, or, more generally, she may abandon one choice of action in favour of its opposite. Phenomena of this kind show, according to Justin, that one and the same person is capable of different and often opposing choices and actions, and this in his view suggests that one can do otherwise. This in turn means, Justin claims, that one’s choices and actions are not fated, because fate cannot determine opposite courses of action and in a sense act, as Justin says, in opposition to herself.<sup>34</sup> Justin goes on to suggest that it is virtue and vice that determine the agent’s choices and actions, and he appeals to passages both from Scripture and Plato in support of this view.<sup>35</sup>

The question, however, is how Justin disarms the claim that some kind of fate is nonetheless at work in human decisions including, as he mentions, one’s changes of mind. It could be argued that every human choice may waver in his decisions from time to time, as Justin claims, but the choice nevertheless remains determined by a number of factors and it is these factors that eventually necessitate one’s final

choice. Justin does not address this view. All that he is concerned with refuting is the claim that the determination of human choices is solely the work of external causes. He does this by arguing, as the Stoics did, that any human choice essentially includes the contribution of the human agent to the overall causal network. The evidence of people's changes of behaviour or changes of mind, which may range from decisions to do otherwise than initially planned to changes in long-time habits and dispositions, shows, according to Justin, that man has the capacity of choosing his own actions. This is all that matters for Justin. If fate is not only an external network of factors but also includes the human character – that is, the human factor – Justin would probably not deny that in this sense everything we do is fated. But he is not concerned with such a view or with such a conception of fate. The view of fate that he criticizes is the claim that external factors critically determine our choices, and this is precisely what Justin sets out to refute. The thesis he adopts is, so to speak, an indeterminist one. Justin further supports this thesis by pointing out that if everything were fated in the sense specified above, this amounts to abolishing virtue and vice and thus all grounds for praise and blame.

In his second *Apology* Justin now argues explicitly against the Stoics, who held that “everything comes to be by necessity of fate” (2 *Apol.* 6.4); if this were the case, Justin argues, God would then be responsible for evils too (6.9). But this is impossible by the Stoics' own admission. Justin adds an argument similar to that of the passage cited above, namely that God made men similar to angels in being free to make their own decisions, in being able to turn towards the one or the other decision (*ep' amphotera trepesthai*), and for this reason, he claims, both humans and angels are accountable for their actions (2 *Apol.* 7.4–6).

Justin's claims against the Stoics are somewhat misplaced, because they distinguished between necessary and fated actions, although some sources conflate the two, just as Justin does.<sup>36</sup> The Stoics clearly acknowledged the decisive role of the human factor in the shaping of one's final choice in such a way that a distinction between causal determinism and necessity becomes clear.<sup>37</sup> The Stoic example of the cylinder and the cone mentioned earlier (p. 140) was meant to suggest that the outcome of rolling or spinning, like one or another of the agent's actions *X* or *Z*, is causally determined and thus fated (in their terminology) given the external factors on the one hand as well as the agent's character on the other; yet, whatever the outcome may be, that outcome is not necessary, because according to the Stoics the agent's mind, like the cylinder in their analogy, contributes the primary or the decisive cause to the causal network, which in this case is the agent's beliefs and his critical disposition towards them.<sup>38</sup> The analogy is meant to illustrate the Stoic compatibilism, that is, the view that one's mind or nature plays the critical or decisive causal role in the quality of the effect.

Justin's criticism of the Stoics may have been inspired by Plutarch and Alexander of Aphrodisias, who criticized the Stoic thesis that human freedom consists in choosing only what is good, instead arguing that human free choice amounts to being able to choose between two possible or even opposing courses of action, *X* or *Y*.<sup>39</sup> Justin makes it evident that he subscribes to this view in the passage cited

above, in which he says that “by the ability to choose freely (*prohairesei eleuthera*) we act rightly or wrongly”. A wrong action, then, can count as a perfectly free action according to Justin. He employs this notion of “free will” because as a Platonist he wishes to emphasize alongside Plato that God is not responsible for any wrongs, only man is (*Rep.* 379c, 617e; *Theaet.* 176a). According to Justin, man exercises his free will and makes a free choice when he chooses either to comply with God’s will and act virtuously or to oppose it and act viciously, even acting against his own interests. For the Stoics, by contrast, the choice of a vicious action is not a free one but one resulting from enslavement to mistaken beliefs; a given choice for the Stoics remains up to us, but its being either free or enslaved depends on which possibility we decide on. For Justin, however, the choice we make is always free no matter what we decide.

Justin’s younger contemporaries Tatian (c. 120–170) and Theophilus (c. 150–220) appear to waver between the Stoic notion of free will and the modified version that we find in contemporary Platonists and Peripatetics such as Plutarch and Alexander. Like Justin, Tatian claims that human actions are not the work of fate (*heimarmenē*) but of human freedom of will (*eleutheria tēs prohairesēs*), and this has to do with the fact that God endowed both men and angels with the power of choosing on our own (*autexousion*; *Or.* 7.1). Tatian then makes an interesting claim: he suggests that humans were originally free but sin made us slaves to wickedness and brought also death; this happened because of our ability to choose on our own (*Or.* 11.2).<sup>40</sup> In Tatian’s view, we lost our freedom and we also became mortal because of a misuse of our ability to choose on our own, our autonomy (*autexousion*); he suggests that man’s soul originally possessed immortality, which we lost because of our fault (7.2–3, 11.2). Nevertheless, Tatian adds, we are still capable of rejecting wickedness and regaining our ability to choose freely (11.2), although he does not tell us how this is possible. Going further, however, Tatian implies that living a life in harmony with God and creation would make that possible, that is, would make us immortal again.

Tatian’s position is close to the Stoic thesis that we cease to be free once we make the wrong choice, but he also holds that we nonetheless retain the power to choose and can regain our freedom of choice if we change our habits and our lives. Tatian does not distance himself much from the Stoic view, because his main target is not the Stoics but rather the astrologists who maintained that the stars determine the course of human lives. Tatian is the first of a series of Christian thinkers who set out to specifically discredit astral determinism. Tatian’s argument is a version of the Stoic “lazy argument”, according to which if it is fated that someone remain poor, then there is no reason for one to work and save money. We clearly do not believe that, Tatian says, and for this reason we daily continue our efforts, including those who argue that fate determines everything (*Or.* 11).

The same line of thought can also be found in Theophilus. He argues that God made man free and autonomous (*eleutheron kai autexousion*), but through neglect and disobedience to God man earned death, while through obedience to God he can regain immortality (*Ad Autol.* II.27). The fact that Theophilus puts freedom



(*eleutheron*) and autonomy (*autexousion*) together suggests that the latter now comes close to meaning “the ability to choose freely”, not just “having power over oneself”, its original meaning. It is noteworthy that Theophilus agrees with Tatian in associating freedom of choice with the immortality of the soul. Theophilus, however, sets out to show that man was created neither mortal nor immortal but capable (*dektikos*) of mortality or immortality, depending on whether he complies with God’s commands or not – an idea we already find in Philo.<sup>41</sup> It is in the course of the discussion about the immortality of the soul that Theophilus introduces the notion of free choice.

Theophilus brings together two stands of thought that we find separated in Justin, namely that God has made us capable of virtue and vice, that is, endowed us with the ability to choose freely (1 *Apol.* 43.3–6), and that the human soul is not immortal by nature but that its immortality is rather conferred onto it by God (*Dial.* 5.4–6). In this manner, Theophilus fleshes out the notion of grace that Justin only roughly sketched out. Theophilus suggests that God grants man immortality, yet God does not do so arbitrarily but in accordance with man’s own use of freedom of choice and autonomy. As Tatian claims, we lost our immortality because of a misuse of our freedom of choice. Such continued misuse brings severe consequences, while the proper use of one’s freedom of choice is rewarded. In doing so, God does not favour some people over others, as the Valentinians claimed, but He does reward those who use their freedom of choice properly by granting them immortality. This is what divine grace is: on the one hand it transcends natural necessity, while on the other it respects man’s freedom of choice.

## Irenaeus and Tertullian

Irenaeus of Lyon pays a great deal of attention to the issue of free will in his anti-Gnostic critique in his *Against the Heretics*.<sup>42</sup> Irenaeus attributes a clear position on this issue to Valentinus and his supporters.<sup>43</sup> Allegedly Valentinus maintained that human beings are made up of three elements: the earthly (*hylikon*); the psychic or biological (*psychikon*); and finally the spiritual (*pneumatikon*), which only few people have. These three elements determine three distinct human natures, depending on which element prevails. Valentinus thus distinguished three classes of people: earthly, psychic, and pneumatic (or spiritual). The latter are made in the image of God, the psychic are those made in God’s likeness (*homoioōsin*), while the earthly are those made neither in the image nor in the likeness of God (*Adv. Haer.* V.6.1). The criterion for this classification is how people fare with regard to salvation, which we could call eschatological destiny. According to Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* I.6.1–3), Valentinians argued that salvation is certain only for the third category of people who are endowed with wisdom, which alone suffices for salvation; their deeds play hardly any role.<sup>44</sup> The first category of people, the earthly, are by nature prone to wickedness and do not have any hope of salvation no matter what they do. The people of the second category, the so-called psychic humans (*psychikoi*), are said to be capable of either good or bad decisions and their salvation is thus

in their own hands. They are the only ones who have autonomy and freedom of choice (*autexousion*). For the Valentinians, however, this is a disadvantage compared with the people of the first category, those who are destined by God to be good.<sup>45</sup>

Irenaeus criticizes Valentinus' doctrine of predestination as both inconsistent and unreasonable and in this context gives his own view on the question of free will. Irenaeus first argues that it is difficult to imagine on what grounds God could have divided people into distinct classes, privileging some over others and how he could have justified such a division. He further suggests that those who take such a view ultimately abolish the value and disvalue of goodness and wickedness, and virtue and vice, respectively, as well as the justification for either praise or blame (IV.37.2). Irenaeus instead claims that God created all people equal; as a result of the divine act of the creation of man, all human beings are endowed with the same nature, that is, all are made in the image and the likeness of God. This in turn means, he claims, that all human beings are able to choose freely (*liber in arbitrio et suae potestatis*) and all can be saved.<sup>46</sup> Irenaeus summarizes his thesis as follows:

Man is endowed with reason and in that respect he is similar to God, being made by his creator so that he is free in judging and in deciding. The cause is placed on man, such that it depends on man alone whether he will become corn or pollen. This is why man is rightly condemned, since as a rational being he has lost true reason and led a life without reason opposing God's justice.

(*Adv. Haer.* IV.4.3)<sup>47</sup>

In this dense passage Irenaeus makes three points: (a) that man is similar to God, which means that there are no degrees of similarity to God among human beings; (b) that similarity to God consists in the fact that man is endowed with the freedom to judge and to choose, that is, to comply with God's justice or not; and (c) that it is man himself who determines his success or happiness in life. Like earlier Christian thinkers, Irenaeus often stresses that freedom of choice and judgement (*liber in arbitrio*) is an essential feature of human beings granted to them by God so that they can freely choose whether to follow God's commands or to neglect them, that is, they can choose between good or evil.<sup>48</sup> Irenaeus emphasizes that in such a case all human beings are equal and it is their choice to become good or bad (*Adv. Haer.* IV.37.2–4). Irenaeus further claims that the proper use of our freedom of choice brings with it the divine gift of immortality as a reward (*Adv. Haer.* V.29.1). This is a point we encountered in Theophilus and also in some form in Justin. Irenaeus offers a stronger version of this view: he suggests that the purpose of the capacity of free choice (*arbitrium, autexousion*) is to lead man to immortality, but this takes place only if this ability is used well (V.29.1). The main aim of this human feature is not simply to enable us to choose as we please, but rather to help us lead a perfect Christian life and to thus attain salvation.

Tertullian is, like Irenaeus, also seriously concerned with arguing against the Gnostics that God is not responsible for evil in the world, while at the same time

maintaining that God is the only principle of the world; he rather suggests that evils have their origin in man alone (*Adv. Marc.* II.6.1). One could, of course, argue that God is ultimately responsible for the evils that man causes on the grounds that God created man and indeed created man in his image and his likeness. Tertullian argues against such a view, claiming, like many of his predecessors, that man is created by God endowed with the ability to choose freely. Like Justin and Irenaeus, Tertullian operates with a notion of free will according to which freedom consists in choosing either good or bad, not a notion based on siding with the good, as the Stoics had. Tertullian advances a series of arguments against the objection that God is ultimately responsible for man's misuse of his will. The first of these arguments develops a line of thought that we first encounter in Theophilus and Irenaeus.

Freedom of will (*libertas arbitrii*) cannot discharge its own blame upon him by whom it was bestowed, but on him by whom it was not made to function as it ought. Of what wrong, then, can you accuse the creator? If of man's sin, I answer that what is man's cannot be God's, nor can he be judged the author of sin who is seen to have forbidden it, even to have condemned it. If death is an evil, not even death can bring odium upon him who threatened it but upon him who disregarded it. This one is its author: he created it by disregarding it, for it would not have come into existence except for his disregard.

*(Adv. Marc.* II.9.9, Evans' trans. modified)

Tertullian adopts the position of earlier Christian thinkers in maintaining that we, humans, alone are responsible for our fortune and he relates the use of the will to the possible immortality of human beings. Like Tatian, he claims that sin amounts to a misuse of free will that brings death with it. Tertullian sustains the claim that the author of death is not God, who linked sin and death, but rather we, humans, who disregarded the necessary link between the two and continue to make ill use of the divine gift of free choice, ignoring God's commands.<sup>49</sup> Tertullian introduces an analogy here: in the same way that God's authorship of the law of gravity does not make him responsible for someone's death if that person disregards gravity by falling from a window, similarly, he claims, it is man who is entirely responsible for his death on account of disregarding the necessary link that God established between sin and death. Nor can one thrust out to God responsibility for the human misuse of free will by conveniently appealing to the existence of the devil, because, Tertullian argues, the devil qua devil is not God's creation either, since God made all angels originally good and it was the devil's misuse of free will that accounts for his corruption.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, he contends, man was created in God's likeness but he has fallen away from the creator and original human nature (*On spectacles* 2.11–12). Tertullian foreshadows the position later adopted by Origen, that God created a variety of intellects engaged in thinking, and as a result of their good or bad use of their thinking did they determine their future lives as angels, demons, or human beings – that is, their characters, temperaments, and inclinations.

Tertullian addresses another question, which will also be tackled by Origen, namely why God endowed us with free will if he knew that this would result in damaging effects, such as bringing vice into the world and being self-destructive for the agent as well. Tertullian suggests that we could not exhibit goodness at all unless we were able to choose it by ourselves, and this ability is a divine gift, because it allows us to do what is good and to have goodness.

So that man could have a goodness of his own, bestowed upon him by God, and that henceforth goodness can be proper to man and a natural attribute, there was granted and assigned to him freedom (*libertas*) and the ability to choose (*potestas arbitrii*), as a kind of transfer of the good bestowed on him by God.

(*Adv. Marc.* II.6.5)

Tertullian bases his view on the assumption that, given the human rationality, there is no way that one can achieve goodness without being committed to reason. Following the Stoics, he holds that rational beings cannot do what is good unless they make a rational choice to this effect. And, like Justin and Tatian, Tertullian appears to think that the choice between good or evil, virtue or vice, are equal expressions of freedom and that having a free will amounts to choosing between opposites, between right and wrong, virtue and vice, a view defended by Alexander against the Stoic conception of freedom (according to which we achieve freedom only when we choose the good).<sup>51</sup> Like earlier Christians, Tertullian finds the Peripatetic view of freedom fitting to his purposes, because he wants to argue against the Gnostics by maintaining that God is neither responsible for any evil nor culpable of favouritism.

However, one could at this point object that not all humans are endowed with the same degree of rationality: some people have very strong non-rational desires due to their particular bodily constitution and their temperaments, while others do not. One could further argue in this vein that God may not be directly responsible for vice or evil but he is nevertheless responsible for a certain lack of equality among men. This lack of equality raises an issue that neither Tertullian nor Irenaeus addressed. They were mainly concerned with arguing against Gnostic determinism and defending the equality of all men only in terms of their power to choose. Clement goes beyond this kind of polemic against the Gnostics and appears to draw on a fully fledged Christian theory of free will, although he does not systematically lay such a theory out.

## Clement of Alexandria

Clement often repeats in his work that man is equipped with the power to make choices freely, which he calls *autexousion* or to *eph' hēmin*. The following passage is indicative of the centrality of this topic in Clement's thought.

Virtue, however, is not up to others but entirely up to us (*eph' hēmin*). One can prevent us from other things by opposing us, but this does not apply to

our capacity of choosing (*to eph' hēmin*) in any way, even if one threatens as much as he can, because this is a divine gift that belongs to nobody else but to us. As a result, licentiousness is not believed to be a vice of someone else but of the licentious one, while temperance is a good of the one who can be temperate.

(*Strom.* IV.19.124.2–3)

The above passage makes two main points: first, that the unconstrained capacity of choice is given to us by God, it is a divine gift; second, that this capacity is a characteristic feature of human beings that makes them accountable for virtue and vice. Both points are quite common to earlier Christian thinkers. Clement, however, distinguishes himself from his predecessors by claiming that the capacity to choose freely is the most essential function of the human mind or of the ruling part of the soul, the *hēgemonikon*, which is the reasoning part. Clement makes that clear in several passages. In his work *The Rich Man's Salvation*, discussing the role of riches in human life, he makes the following claim:

We must not therefore put the responsibility on that which, having in itself neither good nor evil, is not responsible, but on that which has the power of using things either well or badly according to its choice. And this is the mind (*nous*) of man, which has in itself both free judgement (*kritērion eleutheron*) and freedom of choice (*autexousion*) to deal with what is given to it.

(*QDS* 14.2–4; Butterworth's trans. modified)<sup>52</sup>

The above passage is important not only for clearly stating that it is the human choice that makes something good or bad, a claim reminiscent of Socrates' argument in the *Euthudemus* (278e–281e) and the *Meno* (78b–79e), but also the view that the mind (*nous*) is equipped with freedom of choice in order to deal with what is presented to it. Elsewhere Clement suggests that freedom of choice is actually a faculty of the mind (*hēgemonikon*) and indeed the principal one, to which all other faculties are meant to be servants:

What we do not do either we do not do because we cannot or because we do not want to, or because of both . . . The will (*to boulesthai*) then has always the first role. For the other faculties of the mind are meant to be its servants.

(*Strom.* II.16.77.5)<sup>53</sup>

In this passage *to boulesthai* is clearly more than a capacity or a power to choose; it is a faculty of the human mind, and indeed one that dominates over all other faculties. And one relevant question here is what role this feature of the human mind plays to justify such centrality.

It is important to note from the start that Clement brings up the issue of free will in the context of discussing Christian faith. Clement distinguishes between religion based on necessity (*kat' anagkēn*) and on choice (*kata prohaireisin*; *Paed.* I.87.2)<sup>54</sup> and

he maintains that the *Logos* enables man to choose his commitment to the Christian faith (*Paed.* I.30.3–31.1). Clement actually suggests that the human capacity to choose freely (*to hekousion*) essentially exists so that man can accept or deny the guidance of the *Logos* (*Paed.* I.87.1–2). This is a choice (*prohairesis, eklogē*) that man can make with his mind (*hēgemonikon*), given his endowment with a deliberative faculty (*prohairesitikē dynamis; Strom.* VI.16.135.2–4). This choice is, of course, an act of will, but is not one of the ordinary choices we make in everyday life; it is rather a specific kind of choice, namely the choice of assenting to the Christian faith, as the following passage suggests:

Now what is in our power (*eph' hēmin*) is that of which we are masters (*kyrioi*) equally as we are of its opposite, like, for instance, whether we do philosophy or not, whether we believe or disbelieve (*pistein hē apistein*). Since we are equally masters of each of the opposites, it becomes manifest that we have the capacity to choose freely (*to eph' hēmin*).

(*Strom.* IV.24.153.1)

The terms “believe” and “disbelieve” in this context are used in the special sense of commitment (or a lack thereof) to Christian doctrine. In the above passage Clement suggests that our freedom consists in our ability to choose either options, to believe or disbelieve, and, that freedom more generally consists in the ability to choose between opposite options (*ta antikeimena*). Justin also makes this point, as we have seen (p. 142), but he refers to any opposite courses of actions, while Clement refers specifically to the choice of following the Christian faith. Like previous Christian thinkers, but unlike the Stoics, Clement takes the view that our freedom is expressed even when we make the wrong choice and opt for the wicked course of action. He points out, though, that such a choice can be avoided with the guidance we receive from God.

Clement elaborates on this idea particularly in his *Paedagogus* and his *Protrepticus*. He claims that man is not left alone to choose between following or not following God, between believing or disbelieving (in the sense specified above); rather, Clement suggests, the *Logos* stirs in men the desire to follow God and become like God (*Protr.* 117.2). God’s angels, Clement suggests, operate like the daemons of Lachesis in the myth of Er in *Republic X*: they are sent to human souls to help people commit to their choice of life and fulfil it (*Strom.* V.13.90.5–91.5; cf. VI.17.161.2). Clement actually suggests that Socrates’ *daimōn* was something like an angel, helping him commit to the good (V.13.91.5). Clement claims, however, that there is no reason to think that there is a contradiction between God’s callings and the choices we, humans, make, since it remains completely in our power to be convinced or not, to commit to the good and follow God’s commands or not.<sup>55</sup> Wickedness arises in us because of ignorance or weakness, which drag us into directions where we do not actually want to go.<sup>56</sup> Clement adds that God appeals to everyone, although He knows that not everyone will follow him. Divine exhortations are merely a calling; their final endorsement depends on us.

Clement suggests, however, that the fulfilment of this aim requires both our choice and God's assistance, God's grace (*Strom.* V.1.7.1–2).<sup>57</sup> In other words, for Clement the realization of the human end to live a perfect Christian life, to become like God, requires collaboration between man and God. Perfection cannot be achieved by man alone, but rather requires God's assistance.<sup>58</sup> Man's contribution in the project of reaching perfection lies in the assent to follow divine guidance, in willing (*to boulesthai*) to be guided and do what he can do to achieve that goal.<sup>59</sup> Using poetic imagery, Clement likens the voice of God that is perceived through faith in Scripture with the songs of the Sirens that exhibit a power above human and fascinates everyone passing by (*Strom.* II.2.9.7). Clement's point apparently is that, once we have assented to faith, we are being guided by God. Elsewhere he speaks of the call (*klēsis*) that draws the faithful to God (*Strom.* IV.22.145.2).<sup>60</sup> God responds to such human effort and intervenes to assist in the same way that the teacher assists the student (*Strom.* II.16.77.4) and eventually to save man. Clement makes the following remark by addressing the question of who can be saved (*ti dynatai sōthēnai*), given the powerful passions and desires that trouble us, such as the passion for wealth (*QDS* 15–17). Clement makes this remark while speaking of Jesus comparing the chances of rich people entering the kingdom of heaven with a camel trying to enter a needle's eye:

But the Lord answers: "that which is impossible with men is possible for God" (Mark x.27). This again is full of great wisdom, because when practicing and striving after the passionless state by himself man achieves nothing, but if he makes it clear that he is eagerly pursuing this aim and is in deep earnest, he prevails the addition of the power that comes from God. For God breathes his own power into souls when they desire, but if they ever desist from their eagerness, then too the spirit given from God is withdrawn; for to save men against their will is an act of force, but to save them when they choose is an act of grace.

(*QDS* 21.1–2; Butterworth trans.)

Quite importantly, then, for Clement the main task of human free will is to choose a specific kind of life and not merely to choose a certain course of action, as earlier Christians had thought. It is for this reason that Clement draws on Plato's myth of Er in this context. For Clement, as for Plato, it is this choice of a way of life, the kind of *bios*, that matters most, because it is this choice that largely determines all other subsequent choices. Given the importance of this choice, Clement sets out to reconcile our freedom to make this choice with some kind of divine assistance that does not violate human freedom but rather strengthens it.

Quite clearly, with Clement there is a shift in the argument of Christian thinkers regarding our ability to choose freely. Clement does not only speak of the human ability to deal with impressions and assent freely (*autexousion*), or the ability to make choices (*to eph' hēmin*), but he rather speaks of the will (*to boulesthai*) as a central faculty of the human mind. And he further asks the question whether this faculty

suffices to bring us to Christian perfection and salvation, and his answer is negative. We now understand why the human will is so important for Clement; namely, because through this we shape our characters, our lives, and decide what kind of persons we want to be, so that we can attract the divine grace. This is what according to Clement distinguishes the Christian sage (*gnostikos*) from the others: his will (*to boulesthai*) determines his judgement, his actions, his life (*Strom.* II.16.77.5–6). According to Clement, the choice of life that our will makes determines our future choices, our inclinations, and thus critically shapes our lives. This is a step that paves the way for Origen's theory of free will, which aims to show that we are responsible for our characters and constitutions.

## Origen

By Origen's time, the belief that man has the capacity of free choice had become established as a fundamental part of Christian doctrine. Origen develops it further. In the preface of his *On Principles* he lists some fundamental truths, which, he claims, are established through the apostolic teaching, namely the following: (a) there exists one God; (b) Christ was born of the Father before any other created thing; (c) the Holy Spirit is united with the Father and the Son; and finally (d) the soul has a life of its own and will receive its just deserts after the end of earthly life and that every rational soul possesses free will (*Princ.* pref. 4–5). Also, in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John* Origen declares that what separates Christians from others is the belief in God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, as well as the belief that we are free agents.<sup>61</sup>

The importance that Origen attributes to this particular belief is confirmed by the attention he gives to the issue in his writings. The entire third book of his *On Principles* focuses on the issue of the human freedom of choice, and we also find scattered discussions of the same topic in many other parts in his work. Origen's contribution surpassed those of all earlier Christian thinkers in sophistication and subtlety.<sup>62</sup> It is noteworthy that the relevant sections of Origen's work were considered authoritative enough to be included in the anthology *Philokalia* prepared by Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus.<sup>63</sup>

Why was this issue so important for Origen? One reason is that Origen takes the issue of free will to play a critical role in the way in which God relates to the world quite generally and to man more specific ally. Like many other Christian philosophers, Origen maintains that God is the only cause of the world's creation, the only principle of being, so to speak. This thesis immediately raises the question of whether God is also responsible for the evils in the world, which would include not only natural catastrophes, diseases, and accidents (against which Christians could argue, as the Stoics did, that they ultimately contribute to the harmony of the world), but also human vice. As we have seen, Christians such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement argued that man is the only cause of vice and is alone responsible for it, since we were created with freedom of choice, yet God cannot be blamed either for giving us this ability or for our abuse of it. Tertullian in particular claimed



that God granted us the power to choose (*potestas arbitrii*) and that it is human weakness, which is due to the corruption of human nature, that is responsible for its abuse, that is, for sin and its consequences. Clement also argued that wickedness originates in human weakness and suggested that God comes to the aid of those who ask for and want such help. But there is a question. What explains human weakness? There is also a further question. In what sense is man weak? Are we all similarly and equally weak? Or is it the case that some of us are more prone to vice than others and some are better able to resist sin?

An answer in the affirmative to the last question was widespread at the time, with Gnostics and astrologists being its main adherents. We also have Plotinus' testimony in favour of this view (*Enn.* III.1.6.10–11). Plotinus speaks of the way bodily constitution (*krasis sōmatos*) can make the soul feel lust or anger, although he maintains that the soul is free not to give in to such affections (*Enn.* III.1.8.15–17).<sup>64</sup> As we have seen, Irenaeus also argued that all men are of the same nature, which in some sense, of course, is true, since all men share essential common features. It is equally true, though, that humans differ considerably in terms of abilities, constitutions, and temperaments, and the question is why. Why are some more intelligent and others less, some more prone to anger or lust, and others less so? It is untenable to say that God is responsible for the variety of human inclinations, because it makes God unjust. This injustice is of two kinds. First, humans find themselves having certain temperaments, which incline them to making certain choices; and second, if we are not entirely responsible for our inclinations and temperaments, we do not fully deserve the corresponding praise, reward, and punishment that we receive.

This is a major challenge that Origen faces. He raises himself to this challenge of addressing the issue of divine justice or theodicy. Origen sets out to show not only that all human beings equally have the ability to choose freely, but also that it is the good or bad use of that ability that determines the course of, and success in, life. I will focus on the question of divine justice or the issue of theodicy, as is usually called, first.<sup>65</sup>

Origen suggests that God created a population of intellects equal in terms of abilities and tendencies. Their lives consist in nothing but thinking; their thinking involves constantly making choices after considering the available options. In accordance with the choices they make, these intellects develop certain inclinations and habits.<sup>66</sup> The choices they make and the subsequent inclinations they develop eventually determine their future fortune and status as intellectual beings. They will become angels, demons, or human beings of various inclinations, propensities, and potentials. Origen identifies three possible reasons why intellects make the wrong choices and accordingly shape their future: satiety, carelessness, and laziness (*Princ.* I.3.8, I.4.1, II.9.2).<sup>67</sup> These are the reasons that explain why an intellect does not manage to think clearly enough and, as a result, makes the wrong choices. The consequence of such choices is that intellects become gradually corrupted. Corrupted intellects fall into human bodies and bring their inclinations, temperaments, and propensities with them, which are the result of the choices they made as disembodied intellects. As we will see in the next chapter, Origen claims that

the process of the intellect's falling is not equal in all cases; he argues that intellects descend and degrade into souls embodied in mortal bodies, namely "some intellects retain a portion of their original vigour, while others retain none or only very little" (*Princ.* II.8.4). Presumably Origen maintained that before their embodiment into mortal bodies intellects were embodied in an ethereal body, a pneumatic vehicle, as also many Neoplatonists maintained.<sup>68</sup> But, however this is, the point of Origen's theory is that it renders human beings themselves responsible for their inclinations and temperaments. The initial equality bestowed by God was disturbed as a result of the choices made by the intellects themselves.

Origen was probably inspired by a specific philosophical source, Plato's myth of Er in *Republic* X, which, as we have seen, had also inspired Clement. Origen's contemporary, Porphyry, interpreted this myth as suggesting that man has the ability to decide freely (Porphyry, *On What is Up to Us*, frs. 268–271 Smith).<sup>69</sup> The lives that people choose in this myth are guided by the kind of life they had previously lived, as in the case, for instance, of the person in the *Republic* who chooses the life of a tyrant as a result of living virtuously in his previous life but only out of habit and social conformity, not because of his own proper choice (*Rep.* 619cd). The point that past choices determine future ones is also stressed by Aristotle, who claims that, in every choice of action we make, two things are at stake: first, to do what is good in the circumstances; and, second, to further shape through this particular choice our character and hence our future choices in life (*N.E.* 1103a14–25, 1114b1–12).<sup>70</sup> The Stoics also maintained that our present choices affect not only our future choices but also the character of our future impressions; the same impression, a wallet full of money, for instance, may be found attractive or not depending on the character of the person who perceives it, and the nature of this impression has to do with the past choices that have shaped different beliefs in us, which ultimately account for different individual responses. Similar considerations may have inspired Origen's view that our inclinations are ultimately the result of our own choices, the choices of the disembodied intellects we used to be. The fact that we used to be intellects not embodied in a mortal body is especially important, because such intellects are not subject to the needs and desires imposed by the mortal body and the constraints of the physical world. Plotinus makes a similar suggestion (*Enn.* III.1.8.9–14), which is why he advises us to return to our real, intellectual, self, which is not subject to fate and necessity (III.3.9; cf. VI.9.11.45–51).

This, however, is only part of the story. The resulting inclinations and constitutions that humans end up having as a result of the choices they made as intellects before their embodiment to mortal bodies does not mean, Origen argues, that their choices in this life are necessitated. He points out instead that one's natural constitution (*kataskenê*; *Princ.* III.1.5–6) does not necessitate an effect or an action, since many people have often managed to overcome their natural dispositions. Origen addresses in this connection both the Valentinian theory that human beings have been given different natures by God as well as the theory of astral determinism, which had been debated since the days of Justin Martyr, as we have seen.<sup>71</sup> With

regard to astral determinism in particular, Origen presents the following dilemma: either the stars are subordinate to the creator or not;<sup>72</sup> if the latter is the case, then the creator is also subject to astral determinism, which implies that God is not the highest principle, and this is untenable, as Christians since Tertullian have shown. If the former is the case, then it is the creator who determines what happens, which is the opposite of what astral determinists held. Yet one aspect of astral determinism posed a particular threat to Christianity, because it rested on the widespread view at the time that God not only knows future events but also determines them, in which case man is trapped in a play whose ending has already been written. This is a complex issue that requires special attention and detailed discussion. I will limit myself only to some remarks concerning the human ability of free choice, which is my main interest here.

Origen argues that God's foreknowledge does not entail determination of events. Crucial in this regard is his distinction between contingent and necessary events. Following the Stoics, Origen argues that someone's foreknowledge or prediction does not make a future event necessary but only possible. Seneca had already argued that a seer predicts but does not cause an event (*Nat. Quaest.* II.38.2–4). Origen distinguishes between the cause of knowing something and the cause of something, between the cause of an event and the cause of the knowledge of the event (*Philokalia* ch. 23, SC 226: 142). If we assume that the stars show us something and we know it through them, this does not mean, Origen claims, that the stars are also the cause of it; all this means is that the stars make something known, which Origen does not deny. He actually admits that these signs constitute the book of God, as it were, which informs angels about what is going to happen (*Philokalia* ch. 23, 20–21). Origen claims that we have no evidence whatsoever that the stars cause future events, including human actions, let alone necessitate them; in his view the available evidence rather shows that we act by our own will.<sup>73</sup>

One could object, however, that human beings have a nature that often constrains us to make certain choices, thus not allowing us to decide freely. Our bodily desires and affections, for instance, impose on us the necessity of certain choices. No matter what we believe, we get hungry, thirsty, and sleepy at some point, and this motivates us to make certain choices and distract us from other preoccupations. Furthermore, our nature is vulnerable in ways that we cannot always control; if an alarm sounds or someone suddenly threatens us with a knife, we will become terrified, upset, and react accordingly, no matter what we believe. One can say that it is not in our power to not be upset on such occasions, just as it is not in our power not to be hungry, thirsty, or sleepy; if this is the case, one might say that we are not free to decide, or, at least, that we are seriously constrained.

Origen addresses this worry; he distinguishes between things that are moved externally and things that are moved by themselves. The latter are ensouled beings, whose soul is the cause of self-movement (*Princ.* III.1.2). Self-movers such as animals are moved by the impressions (*phantasiai*) they have, which in turn give rise to impulses (*hormē*). Like the Stoics, Origen claims that we have no power over the impressions we receive, but we, unlike the other animals, have the power to

deal with them, to judge them (*krinein*; III.2.3). Origen admits that some impressions may be particularly enticing and may be caused by evil powers, like the devil, by our bodily constitutions, or even by God. Origen argues, though, that these impressions, however strong or tempting they may be, do not have the power to make us decide; all they can do is to agitate us (*Princ.* III.1.4, III.2.4). Agitations are only first or natural movements (*primi, naturali motus*; *Princ.* III.2.2), irritations and excitements (*gargalismoi, erethismoi*; III.1.4) that we cannot avoid, and in this sense they are involuntary (*Commentary on Psalms* PG 12, 1144).<sup>74</sup> Yet, Origen claims, we still have the power to resist them and to decide against them. The following passage illustrates Origen's theory.

But if anyone should say that the external stimulus is such that it is impossible to resist it since it is of this kind, let him look at his own affections (*pathē*) and movements and see whether there is not an approval, an assent (*sygkatathesis*), and an inclination (*rhōpē*) of the reasoning faculty (*hēgemonikon*) towards this attitude because of its convincing power. For when a woman presents in front of a man who has decided to remain chaste and abstain from sexual intercourse and invites him to do something against his intention (*para prothēsin*), she does not become the complete (*autotelēs*) cause of abandoning this intention. It is rather because he has entirely approved of the irritation (*gargalismos*) and the lure of pleasure and he did not want to resist or to confirm his previous judgement that he commits to the licentious action.

(*Princ.* III.1.4)

Origen distinguishes here between the involuntary external movement, which he calls irritation, and the rational decision that handles these movements and responds to them. He distinguishes, for instance, between the boiling of our heart, which happens to us when someone offends us, and the anger that comes about by our assent to it (*Commentary on Psalms* PG 12, 1396AB). In his *On Anger* Seneca distinguishes similarly between the offence that stirs the soul (*agitatio animi*) and the assent (*adsensus mentis*) to the impression of offence and the desire for vengeance (*De ira* II.3–5). For Seneca only the latter is a passion, while the first is not, as is a first involuntary movement (*primus motus non voluntarius*). Origen follows the Stoics in considering this mental state a pre-passion, a *propatheia* (*Commentary on Psalms* 1141D). This is an involuntary (*aprohairesion*) mental state that comes about in us because of our human nature and becomes a passion when we assent to it; only then it is voluntary (*prohairesion*; *Commentary on Psalms* 1141D). This is a useful conceptual scheme when Origen comes to discussing the affections of Christ. He claims that Christ had only *propatheiai* when he was facing arrest and torture, which was in accordance with his human nature, but he did not have proper passions to the extent that he did not give assent to them.<sup>75</sup>

Origen's point is that, however agitating a first movement may be, it cannot force someone's assent and it cannot make someone act against his resolution; rather, he claims, reason always has the power to bounce back and resist such first

movements (*Princ.* III.1.4–5). Following Epictetus,<sup>76</sup> Origen argues that it is reason that administers (*chrēssasthai*) the impressions (*Princ.* III.1.4–5). Neither can one blame one's temperament or inclination as being responsible for a certain choice, because impressions, Origen claims, have no power other than the one we give to them by the way we deal with them, as is shown by the fact that others with even more of an inclination to similar desires manage to resist the same temptations (*Princ.* III.1.5). The wrong way to treat them is to indulge them and start considering them. This results in certain thoughts (*cogitationes*; λογισμοί; *Princ.* III.2.4). Such thoughts as well as memories of past impressions can still be resisted, whereas by entertaining them we give first movements more power and they in turn urge us with more pressure to be guided by them (*Princ.* III.2.4).

Later ascetic tradition will focus on these tempting thoughts that we entertain and on how to resist them. An important representative of this tradition is Evagrius of Pontus. Evagrius speaks of eight kinds of enticing thoughts (*logismous*) that can move or affect us. Sometimes, he says, these thoughts are introduced to our intellect by the demons, which stir some movement in us.<sup>77</sup> It is not up to us to not be moved by these thoughts,<sup>78</sup> he claims, but it is entirely up to us how we treat them; that is, whether we will indulge them or not. If we do indulge these moving thoughts, the equivalent to Origen's first movements, we give them power to stir up affections in our soul (*pathē kinein*).<sup>79</sup> In Evagrius' terms, the first movements, however these come about, are only temptations and they can never conquer us unless we give assent; only when assent is given to them does sin come in. In essence this is also Origen's view.

It turns out that Origen defends a view of human free will similar to that of the Stoics. However, unlike the Stoics but like earlier Christian thinkers, Origen assumes that we do not lose our free will when we give assent to the impressions we should have resisted. We simply make bad use of, or do not at all use, our free will (cf. *C. Cels.* VII.69) and yet we retain our freedom, no matter how often or how much we err, since this freedom is a divine gift and we have it from the moment we are created.

Origen illustrates that point by making reference to the biblical story of God's hardening the heart of Pharaoh (Exodus 4:23; *Princ.* III.1.8–12). The story was discussed by Paul (Rom. 9:16–18) and apparently also by the Gnostics (*Princ.* III.1.20), who found in it an instance of God's predetermination. Pharaoh was not predetermined to act as he did; yet he was not completely free, either. His previous (malicious) actions and his overall character made the hardening of his heart an outcome consistent with his temperament. Origen construes the story as suggesting that freedom of choice is a divine gift which we can neglect and misuse. Evagrius takes a similar position in this regard, claiming that our intellect can become captive or enslaved if we keep giving assent to tempting thoughts, that is, we can thus lose our freedom of choice.<sup>80</sup> To return to Origen, he, like Clement, believes that our will is not sufficient to help us stand with the good, but that our choices for the good must be assisted and corroborated by divine grace (*Princ.* III.2.2). And, as with Clement, Origen does not think that this violates human

freedom of choice, but rather respects it and strengthens human beings committed to the good and to Christian faith, helping them to overcome their weaknesses and constantly and firmly abide with the good (*Princ.* III.1.15). What is more, Origen maintains, against the Stoics, that when our soul becomes perfectly committed to God it cannot lose its free will again, that is, God will keep us attached to the good (*Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* V.10.15).<sup>81</sup>

Origen's positions on the question of theodicy and on human free will are inextricably related, insofar they mean to show that man alone is the master of his own lot in life and that he alone is responsible for any wickedness. Yet, while Origen's theory of theodicy will meet with criticism and resistance from later generations of Christians, his theory of free choice will exert a strong influence on them. Later Christians will deny God's responsibility for human constitutions without assuming the existence of disembodied intellects; they will rather argue that humans are responsible for the temperaments they develop and capable of changing them. We find such positions in Nemesius and the Cappadocians, whom I will consider next.

### Nemesius, Basil, and Gregory of Nyssa

In his work *On the Nature of Man*, written perhaps in the last decade of the fourth century, Nemesius takes a more naturalist view of human constitution than Origen. Nemesius devotes quite some space in his work to the issue of fate and what is up to us (chs. 35–41). He starts the discussion of the issue with a criticism of astral determinism and fatalism (chs. 35, 36), the latter being the view that he associates with the Stoics, namely the view that we have the power to choose, yet fate nonetheless determines everything. Nemesius argues that both views are utterly inconsistent; for the proponents of such views claim on the one hand that fate determines everything and on the other they admit that often things do not turn out according to fate because God either prevents it or that some people manage to evade it – in the latter case foolish people who are incapable of choice (36, 106–108). If such people are incapable of choice because of fate, then choice is nonetheless up to us; if, however, they fall outside the realm of fate, then fate's power is limited and does not govern everything and everyone (36, 108). Nemesius claims instead that man is the origin of his own works and has the power to choose.<sup>82</sup> This is proper to human nature to the extent that we are rational (41, 117); Nemesius claims that being rational implies the ability to deliberate and choose a course of action (41, 117). This in turn means that the choice between virtue and vice is up to us and that we also have the ability to habituate ourselves and to develop certain dispositions (39, 113–114). Like Aristotle, Nemesius goes on to claim that our habits and dispositions motivate our actions, and to the extent that we are responsible for the former we are also responsible for the latter.<sup>83</sup>

Nemesius admits that our temperaments (*kraseis*) may be unfavourable partly because of reasons that do not have to do entirely with us but with our parents or our environment. He claims, however, that our temperaments are not outcomes of previously lived lives of intellects, as Origen argued, but are rather acquired in the

course of one's life according to the life one has lived (41, 120.1–5). Nemesius suggests that we are largely responsible for shaping our temperaments depending on how we handle our desires or emotions (40, 116.16–117.5)<sup>84</sup> and also depending on whether we resist the inclinations of our temperaments or give in to them (117.1–5). The view that Nemesius presents here must have been inspired by Galen's work *That the Qualities of the Soul Follow the Temperaments of the Body*, where Galen argues precisely for this view.<sup>85</sup> Philosophically this view is in the same line of thought as Origen's, namely to the extent that Nemesius joins Origen in claiming that we alone are responsible for our temperaments, our characters, and our dispositions as a result of how we handle the impressions we encounter. Like Tertullian and Origen, Nemesius claims that God cannot be held responsible for granting us the power of choice (*dynamis prohairetikē*; 41, 118.4–119.6), a phrase that Clement first used, as I mentioned above. Nor is it reasonable to suggest, Nemesius argues, that God should have made man incapable of evil (41, 118.6–8). Those who argue thus fail to understand that human rationality implies autonomy, that is, the ability to choose, and this ability may lead us to choose the good or the bad (41, 118.6–8). Nemesius vindicates the view of earlier Christian philosophers that autonomy is an essential feature of human rationality, which means that the more reasonable we become, the more autonomy we gain. This position is of course similar to the Stoics' and Origen's view, but Nemesius' argument for it differs from both.

Basil, alongside Gregory of Nyssa, also takes issue with astral determinism and his critique of it serves as a basis for outlining his own view on human autonomy. Basil does this in his *Homilies on the Hexameron* and Gregory does so mainly (but not exclusively) in his short treatise *Against Fate*.

Basil sets out to defend Genesis 1:14 against a misunderstanding on the part of astral determinists (*Hex.* 6.5–7).<sup>86</sup> He interprets the relevant passage of Genesis as saying that the celestial bodies function as signs of seasons, days, and years (6.4), and opposes those who claim that our life is determined by the movement of the stars (6.5). Basil advances three arguments against this claim. First, he argues that it is impossible to calculate with precision the position of the stars at the time of one's birth, which allegedly determines the fortune of the newly born (6.5, 54C–55C). Second, he claims that the astrologists ascribe to human beings features not of stars but of animals, like the scorpion and the bull, and this is hardly credible, since human beings are different from animals, a point that Nemesius also made (6.5, 56A–57B; *De nat. hom.* ch. 2, 34–36). Finally, and more importantly, Basil argues that it is absurd to believe that the stars can become malignant and affect human beings accordingly, because as celestial beings they have no liberty or morals of their own. Basil presents us here with a dilemma that goes back to Origen: either the stars have the liberty to act on their own and assume moral characteristics, in which case they are not subordinate to God, which means that God is not powerful enough, or, if they are subordinate to God, then God is the actual author of wickedness whenever the stars turn maleficent and exert their corresponding influence on human beings (56BC). None of these positions is tenable, however.

Basil argues at length against such a view in his treatise *That God is not the Author of Evils*. He maintains that evil (*kakon*) is not something that subsists (*hypostasis*), that is, evil does not exist autonomously and has not been created by God, as all real beings have, but rather it is a privation (*sterēsis*) of goodness (*That God is not the Author of Evils*; PG 31, 341B). This is exactly the view that Proclus will later advocate in his treatise *On the Existence of Evils*.<sup>87</sup> Proclus will criticize previous Platonists who associate evil either with the world-soul (Plutarch) or with matter (Numenius, Plotinus) in an effort to preserve God's innocence in the existence of evil. Proclus instead argues that evil is a privation of goodness, for which God is responsible, and that evil is thus an unwanted side effect of creation and goodness, just as a shadow is a side effect of one's standing in the light. Thus, neither does he compromise his monism, as Plutarch and Numenius have done, nor does he imply God's responsibility for evil. Basil, however, differs from Proclus in that he considers evils not as side effect or a privation of goodness in the way that shadows are side effects; rather, he argues that evils come into being by the will of a human being or of an angel who deliberately wants to alienate himself from God. Basil claims that evil is precisely this alienation (*allogriōsis*) from God, which amounts to sin (PG 31, 348A). All other so-called evils, such as illnesses, the deaths of loved ones, are intended by God to edify and eventually benefit us (332CD). Basil concludes by claiming that the only possible cause of evil is our autonomy and our ability to choose (*autexousion; prohairesis*; 344B, 345BD); it is this power that shapes our lives. Basil links autonomy with human rationality in a way similar to that of Nemesius and stresses man's autonomy and his likeness to God (344B–D). And, like Clement, Basil argues that the commitment to Christian life is liberating and invites the enlightening activity of the Spirit in human life.<sup>88</sup>

The view that God is not the author of evils and that evil is a privation of goodness is also taken by Gregory of Nyssa in his work *Against Fate*.<sup>89</sup> Gregory denies that evil exists naturally in the world and that it is an element pertaining to the constitution of beings (*De an.* 116C, 120AB, GNO 86.17–87.5, 90.1–91.7) because this would mean that God allowed for such a state of affairs, which is impossible since God is good (*De an.* 120A; GNO 90.1–5). For Gregory, evil occurs only because of man's choices in the course of human life, that is, when we make bad use of the power to choose (*prohairesis* *dynamis* *De an.* 120C, GNO 91.2–12). Gregory makes an interesting distinction here between “freedom from” (*eleutheria*) and “freedom to”, which amounts to our power to choose (*prohairesis*).<sup>90</sup> The latter is a power or a faculty (*dynamis*) that administers, handles, and controls our impressions and oversees everything we do (*On the Song of Songs*, GNO VI, 345–346). Thanks to *prohairesis*, man is master of himself or, as Gregory puts it, “father of himself”. It is this faculty that eventually gives birth to the kind of self that we would like to have, that ultimately makes us virtuous or vicious in the same way that natural birth brings about male and female animals (*Vita Mosis* 328B).<sup>91</sup>

Like Clement, Origen, and Basil, Gregory stresses that the main factor that shapes our lives is our power to choose (*prohairesis*). He actually comes close to



speaking of a choice of life or character, like Clement and Origen, when he says that someone's *prohairesis* amounts to one's fate (*Against Fate*, GNO III.2, 56.17–18). Gregory makes this claim in *Against Fate* while arguing against a pagan interlocutor who maintains that “everything happens according to inescapable fate” (GNO III.2, 35.14).<sup>92</sup> Gregory's interlocutor supports his view by arguing that there is a connection between all things in the world (*sympatheia*) and this involves a connection between astral movements and humans such that the movements of planets determine human characters and lives (GNO III.2, 37.14–38.10). Like Basil, Gregory argues strongly against this position, attacking both its theoretical foundations and the empirical evidence adduced in its support.

Gregory accuses the astrologists of generally eliminating natural causes and attributing instead natural phenomena to causes that are foreign to their nature. His argument focuses instead on the role that natural causes play in the world. Human and astral nature, he says, are distinct and their natural movements are also distinct (*Against Fate* 40.23–41.5). Gregory further argues that the movement of the celestial spheres is like any other movement in nature, and as such it cannot be responsible for fate (45.11–46.5). If we want to predict someone's future, Gregory claims, we do not have to look at the heavenly bodies but at one's individual features of soul and body alike. This is because, Gregory continues, such features result from natural causes that operate in humans and are often accompanied by clear signs, which we recognize and which help us understand human character (49.20–50.11).

Gregory mentions earthquakes as a parallel phenomenon resulting from natural causes. An earthquake, he says, does not have anything to do with fate, which allegedly results from the movements of heavenly bodies; it is rather a geological phenomenon with natural causes of a specific, geological kind (54.12–55.17). It is noticeable that Gregory joins the pagan tradition of explaining natural phenomena with reference to their corresponding natural causes rather than the Christian or biblical tradition (or one branch thereof) that favours a theological explanation. Seneca is a clear example of the former when he suggests that geological phenomena are governed by natural laws (*iura naturae*; *Nat. Quaest.* III.16.4) and that such phenomena (earthquakes in particular) contribute to natural harmony (III.29.4). In the biblical tradition, however, earthquakes are presented as events suggesting the presence or wrath of God (Exodus 19:18; Isaiah 2:19; Matthew 24:7–8).

Gregory stresses the role of natural causes because he wants to steer clear both from explaining human behaviour in terms of God's arrangements, as the Valentinians did, and from explaining it as a result of cosmic events, as the astrologists did. Gregory sets out to argue that human behaviour and human action has a natural cause too, as is the case with all natural beings and with all natural phenomena; in the case of human beings, the natural cause that explains human action is *prohairesis*. This is also the element that more generally shapes our characters and our lives. In this sense Gregory makes man alone responsible for happiness and failure, just as Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics also believed.

## Conclusion

We have seen that early Christian philosophers were strongly preoccupied with the question of free will and human responsibility. They set out to argue against those who maintained that our choices, our characters, and ultimately our lives are determined to turn out this or the other way (the positions of the Valentinian Gnostics and astral determinists), and that we have the power to choose and that nothing can force our assent. While early Christian philosophers from Justin onwards defend the human capacity of free choice, Clement takes the step of making this capacity a faculty of the human mind (*to boulesthai*) and indeed one that plays the primary role in our mental life. This faculty is now made responsible not only for our choices in everyday life but more importantly for our choice of life. For Clement this is the main choice that we have to make, since it determines our life in general. The implication is that this choice shapes all further choices as well as our temperaments and characters. Origen makes an important contribution to the debate by arguing that not only our choices are free but that we also are the authors of our temperaments and characters. Nemesius and the Cappadocians follow up on this and lend further support to Origen's idea without assuming a pre-existing, disembodied intellect; they rather focus on the natural features of the human mind and body that we need to train and educate so that we always remain in control of ourselves and, in this sense, remain free. The power to choose is now considered a feature of human rationality, and this is where they locate man's likeness to God, in reason and autonomy. Human autonomy is important for salvation not only because we are able to choose certain actions but also a certain way of life, namely the Christian one. Such a commitment alone will not bring salvation but will attract the activity of the Spirit that is of divine grace, which will bring us to perfection. This is the line of thought that we find first in Clement and later in the Cappadocians.

## Notes

- 1 On the role of necessity in the *Timaeus*, see Johansen (2004: 96–99).
- 2 See *Enn.* VI.8.13.50–59. On Plotinus' treatment of free will (esp. in *Enn.* VI.8), see Eliasson (2008).
- 3 See, e.g., Cicero, *De nat. deor.* II.18–19, III.16–17 and ps-Aristotle, *De mundo* 394a–396a, who argues for the indestructibility of the world despite destructive cosmic events (396a27–32).
- 4 See Cumont (1912) and Long (1982). As Long observes, we need to distinguish between a hard astral determinism and a soft, semiotic, astrology. The former maintains that the stars determine cosmic events, while the latter that they only foreshadow them (*ποιεῖν* vs *σημαίνειν*, in the ancient terminology; e.g. Plotinus, *Enn.* III.1.5.41). Plotinus (*Enn.* II.3.1 and III.1.5–6) rejects the former but accepts the latter. Similar is the attitude of Origen, *In Genesin*, in Eusebius, *PE.* VI.11.54–72 (= *Philokalia* SC 226, ch. 23, 258–268).
- 5 Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Astrologists*, Plotinus, *Enn.* II.3 (*On Whether the Stars Create*); cf. ps-Plutarch, *On fate* 574d; Nemesius, *On the Nature of Man* chs. 35–37.
- 6 On the Valentinian views on free will, see Dihle (1982: 152–157), Thomassen (2006), and below.

- 7 On the term ἐφ' ἡμῖν, see Bobzien (1998a: 276–290, 334) and also Gourinat (2014). Cf. Epictetus *Discourses* 1.1, Marcus Aurelius 6.32, Alexander *On Fate* 181.15, Plutarch *De stoic. Rep.* 1056d.
- 8 On the term προαίρεσις, see Bobzien (1998a: 402–406), Frede (2011: 44–48), and Brouwer (2020).
- 9 See Long (2002: 207–220) and Sorabji (2007).
- 10 The term ἀντεξούσιον occurs in Epictetus, *Discourses* 4.1.62, 68, 100, in Alexander, *On Fate* 182.22–24; cf. *SVF* II.975 (associated with Chrysippus). See Bobzien (1998a: 332–336, 353–355), Frede (2011: 74–75, 102–104).
- 11 I find it plausible and also possible that also Valentinus used the term *autexousion*, since the term is used already by Philo, *De ebrietate* 44.1; *De plantatione* 46.4; *Quaestiones in Genesis* IV 51b11. See the notes in Doutreleau and Rousseau (1979: vol. I, 201–204).
- 12 See Burnyeat's classic paper (1980).
- 13 See Origen, *Princ.* III.1.21 on Paul's Rom. 9:18–21.
- 14 For the emergence of the notion of will, see Kahn (1988), and especially Bobzien (1998a, 1998b), and Frede (2011). I am especially indebted to Frede's account here.
- 15 In this respect I side with Bobzien (1998a, 1998b) and Frede (2011) against Dihle (1982).
- 16 *D.L.* VII.134; *SVF* II.300; LS 44B; cf. Cicero, *De nat. deor.* III.92.
- 17 *D.L.* VII.147; *SVF* II.1021; cf. *SVF* 1022–1024, Cicero, *De nat. deor.* II.73–153.
- 18 See also Galen *PHP* IV.2, 338 (*SVF* II.462), Sextus Empiricus, *A.M.* VII.234 (LS 53F). For a discussion, see Long (1996).
- 19 Cicero, *Acad.* I.40 (LS 40B). See Long (2015: 175–176). Cicero translated *sygkatathésis* as *adsensio*.
- 20 See Long (2002: 207–220).
- 21 See Sorabji (2007), Long (2015: 181–189), Brouwer (2020: 41–42).
- 22 See Long (2015: 184–186).
- 23 Long (2002) translates *prohairesis* as “volition”, while Frede (2011) translates it as “will”.
- 24 This is the case especially Christians of the ascetic tradition such as Evagrius (c. 345–399) but also Basil. See below, “Origen”, “Basil and Gregory of Nyssa”.
- 25 Origen knows Epictetus and appreciates his work (*C. Cels.* VI.2); see also Chapter 6, n. 12.
- 26 Chrysippus defines freedom (*eleutheria*) as the ability to act of your own account (*exousian autopragias*) and slavery as its lack (*sterēsin autopragias*; *D.L.* VII.121; *SVF* III.355; LS 67M).
- 27 See Epictetus, *Disc.* I.29.1: “The essence of the good is a certain kind of *prohairesis* and that of the evil is a certain kind of *prohairesis*.”
- 28 See *D.L.* VII.149 (*SVF* I.175). I am indebted to Brouwer (2020: 34–35) on this point.
- 29 See Clement, *Strom.* VIII.9.33.1–9 (*SVF* II.351; LS 55I); Cicero, *De fato* 39–43 (*SVF* II.974; LS 62C); Alexander, *On Fate* 191.30–192.28 (*SVF* II.945; LS 55N); Gellius, *Noct. Att.* VII.2.6–13 (LS 62D).
- 30 On this issue, see Bobzien (1998a: 259–271).
- 31 For a discussion of Justin's view on free will, see Amand (1945: 201–207).
- 32 1 *Apol.* 28.3–4, *Dial.* 88.5, 102.4, 141.1
- 33 Justin's phrase *πλειστάκις μετετιθέτο* (1 *Apol.* 43.6) is noticeable in this context. The verb *μετατιθέναι* can mean “change one's mind” (see LSJ *s.v.*). Clement later uses the terms *μεταπίπτον* and *μεταπτώτικός* to indicate what is subject to change in our mind (*Strom.* II.16.76.1).
- 34 This must have been a stock argument against necessity, that is, things that admit the opposite are not governed by necessity. Cf. Alexander, *On Fate* ch. 9, 174.29–176.17. See Bobzien (1998a: 137–139).
- 35 1 *Apol.* 44.1–8, invoking Deuteronomy 30:15, 19, Isaiah 1:16–20, Plato, *Republic* 617e.
- 36 Compare Cicero, *On fate* 39–43 (*SVF* II.974; LS 62B) with Gellius, *Attic Nights* 7.2.6–13 (LS 62D). The latter speaks of *necessitas fati*, as Justin does.
- 37 The Stoics also use the argument that praise and blame require free will; cf. Chrysippus *SVF* II.998, Gellius, *Attic Nights* VII.2.

- 38 For a discussion of the Stoic example, see Bobzien (1998a: 259–271; 1998b).
- 39 This is the view of Alexander of Aphrodisias and of Plutarch. See the comments of Boys-Stones (2007b) and Frede (2011: 89–101). Further affinities between Justin and Alexander are noted by Minnis (2010: 268).
- 40 οὐκ ἐγένωμεθα πρὸς τὸ ἀποθνήσκειν, ἀποθνήσκομεν δὲ δι' ἑαυτούς. ἀπόλεσεν ἡμᾶς τὸ αὐτεξούσιον. Δούλοι γεγόναμεν οἱ ἐλεύθεροι, διὰ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἐπράθημεν (*Or.* 11.2).
- 41 See, for instance, Philo, *On creation* 135.
- 42 On Irenaeus' views on free will, see Amand (1945: 212–223), Fantino (1985), and Osborn (2001).
- 43 Here I am mainly concerned with the theory that Irenaeus attributes to Valentinus and much less concerned with the historical accuracy of that theory. See also Clement, *Strom.* II.3.10.2. For a more general picture of the Valentinian theory, see Quispel (1947), Thomassen (2006), and Magris (2020).
- 44 On this see Dubois (2016) who alerts us to the difficulties of Irenaeus' account vis à vis other Valentinian texts. The spiritual nature is discussed by Quispel (1947) and Dunderberg (2008: 134–146).
- 45 On Valentinus' theory of will, see further Dihle (1982: 150–157). Valentinus relies partly on Paul's distinction between earthly and spiritual men in the Letter to Romans 8:5.
- 46 Cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* IV.4.3, IV.37.1, 4; *Demonstr.* 11, SC 406: 98. See further Fantino (1985: 5–8, 68–75) and Osborn (2001: 211–216), who discuss the concepts of the image and likeness of God in Irenaeus and their difference.
- 47 *Homo vero rationabilis, et secundum hoc similis Deo, liber in arbitrio factus et suae potestatis, ipse sibi causa est ut aliquando quidem frumentum, aliquando autem palea fiat. Quapropter et iuste condemnabitur, quoniam rationabilis factus amisit veram rationem, et irrationabiliter vivens adversatus est iustitiae Dei* (*Adv. Haer.* IV.4.3).
- 48 *Veterem legem libertatis hominis manifestavit, quia liberum eum Deus fecit, ab initio habentem suam potestatem sicut et suam animam, ad utendum sententia Dei voluntarie, et non coactum ab eo. Vis enim a Deo non fit, sed bona sententia adest illi semper* (*Adv. Haer.* IV.37.1); cf. *Adv. Haer.* IV.37.4.
- 49 On this topic, see further Osborn (1997: 167–170).
- 50 I try to stay true to Tertullian's own words, when he speaks of man *sua sponte corruptum* – that is, “corrupted of his own act” (*Adv. Marc.* II.10.1). For a similar argument against those who try to associate God with human malice on the grounds that God is the source of human reason, see Cicero, *De nat. deor.* III.75–85.
- 51 On Alexander's conception of free will, see Frede's critical assessment (2011: 95–101).
- 52 Οὐ χρὴ τοίνυν τὸ ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ μὴ ἔχον μῆτε τὸ ἀγαθὸν μῆτε τὸ κακόν, ἀναίτιον ὄν, αἰτιάσθαι, ἀλλὰ τὸ δυνάμενον καὶ καλῶς τούτοις χρῆσθαι καὶ κακῶς, ἀφ' ὧν ἂν ἔληται, κατ' αὐτὸ <τοῦτο αἴτιον ὄν>. τοῦτο δ' ἔστι νοῦς ἀνθρώπου, καὶ κριτήριον ἐλεύθερον ἔχων ἐν ἑαυτῷ καὶ τὸ αὐτεξούσιον τῆς μεταχειρίσεως τῶν δοθέντων (*QDS* 14.2–4).
- 53 ἃ δὲ μὴ ποιοῦμεν, ἦτοι διὰ τὸ μὴ δύνασθαι οὐ ποιοῦμεν ἢ διὰ τὸ μὴ βούλεσθαι ἢ δι' ἀμφοτέρα . . . προηγείται τοίνυν παντῶν τὸ βούλεσθαι. αἱ γὰρ λογικαὶ δυνάμεις τοῦ βούλεσθαι διάκονοι πεφύκασι (*Strom.* II.16.77.2–5). It is noticeable that Clement uses neither βούλησις, as the early Stoics, nor βούλημα, as Epictetus. The infinitive (βούλεσθαι) covers both the act of willing (βούλησις) and the resulted choice (βούλημα). On these terms, see Brouwer (2020).
- 54 Cf. *Strom.* VII.12.73.5. On this topic, see further Karavites (1999) and Havrda (2011b).
- 55 ὁ θεὸς λόγος κέκραγεν πάντας συλλήβδην καλῶν, εἰδὼς μὲν καὶ μάλιστα τοὺς μὴ πεισθησομένους, ὅμως δ' οὖν, ἐφ' ἡμῖν τὸ πείθεσθαι τε καὶ μὴ, ὡς μὴ ἔχειν ἄγνοιαν προφασίσασθαι τινας, δικαίαν τὴν κλήσιν πεποίηται, τὸ κατὰ δύναμιν δὲ ἐκάστου ἀπαιτεῖ (*Strom.* II.5.26.3).
- 56 ὅτι τὸ πιστεῦεν τε καὶ πείθεσθαι ἐφ' ἡμῖν. κακῶν δὲ αἰτίαν καὶ ὕλην ἂν τις ἀσθένειαν ὑπολάβοι καὶ τὰς ἀβουλήτους τῆς ἀγνοίας ὀρμὰς τὰς τε ἀλόγους δι' ἀμαθίαν ἀνάγκας (*Strom.* VI.3.16.2; cf. VI.2.9.4).

- 57 See also *Strom.* V.12.83.1, where Clement says that “when our freedom of choice [τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν αὐτεξούσιον] approaches the good it jumps and leaps over the trench, as athletes say. But it is not without special grace that the soul is . . . raised.” For further discussion, see Havrda (2011b).
- 58 The following passage from *The Rich’s Man Salvation* is important in this regard: “Εἰ θέλεις τέλειος γενέσθαι. οὐκ ἄρα πῶ τέλειος ἦν. οὐδὲν γὰρ τελείου τελειότερον. καὶ θεῖος τὸ “εἰ θέλεις” τὸ αὐτεξούσιον τῆς προσδιαλεγομένης αὐτῷ ψυχῆς ἐδήλωσεν. ἐπὶ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ γὰρ ἦν ἡ αἴρεσις ὡς ἐλευθέρῳ, ἐπὶ θεῷ δὲ ἡ δόσις ὡς κυρίῳ. δίδωσι δὲ βουλομένοις καὶ ὑπερσπουδακῶσι καὶ δεομένοις, ἵν’ οὕτως ἴδιον αὐτῶν ἢ σωτηρία γένηται” (*QDS* 10). “If thou wilt become perfect” [*Math.* 19: 21]. So he was not yet perfect; for there are no degrees of perfection. And the “if thou wilt” was a divine declaration of the freedom of choice of the soul that was talking with Him. For the choice lay with the man as a free being, though the gift was with God as Lord. And He gives to those who desire and are in deep earnest and beg, that in this way salvation may become their own (Butterworth’s trans. modified).
- 59 *Strom.* II.5.26.3–4, II.16.77.4–5, VII.2.9.4, VII.2.12.1–5.
- 60 I am grateful to Johannes Steenbuch for drawing my attention to the last two passages of *Stromata*.
- 61 *In Joh.* 32.16, 451.30–32 Preuschen. I owe the reference to Frede (2011: 106, 191).
- 62 On Origen’s treatment of free will, see Van der Eijk (1988), Böhm (1999), Lekkas (2001), Sorabji (2001), Boys-Stones (2007a), Frede (2011: ch. 7), Hengstermann (2016), and Edwards (2020).
- 63 They make up chapters 21–27 of *Philokalia*. On this work, see the introduction by Junod (2006: 10–20). The chapters include parts from *Against Celsus*, *On Principles*, and from several commentaries by Origen.
- 64 See also Nemesius, *De nat. hom.* 40.116.18–22 Morani. On Nemesius, see below.
- 65 Origen’s position on theodicy has been recently discussed in detail by Arruzza (2011: 129–205). Ramelli (2013: 137–221) presents, very thoroughly, Origen’s case against Valentinian and also Stoic determinism.
- 66 For an analysis of Origen’s theory presented here, see Frede (2011: 108–112) and Arruzza (2011: 133–143).
- 67 See Frede (2011: 122–123). Origen speaks of what we may call internal determinism.
- 68 For further discussion, see Ramelli (2018c) and Chapter 5, pp. 182–184.
- 69 On Porphyry’s use of the myth of Er, see Taormina (2014).
- 70 See also *N.E.* 1114b1–13, 1114b22–24, where Aristotle argues that we are responsible for our dispositions: καὶ γὰρ τῶν ἕξεων συναίτιοι πῶς αὐτοὶ ἐσμὲν, καὶ τῷ ποιοι τινες εἶναι τὸ τέλος τοιόνδε τιθέμεθα.
- 71 On the treatment of astral determinism by early Christians, see Hegedus (2007). Origen’s argument against it is discussed by Frede (2011: 114–116).
- 72 *In Gen.* I.14; *Philokalia* ch. 23, SC 226: 138.
- 73 ἰδίᾳ προαιρέσει ποιοῦμεν (*Philokalia* ch. 23, 21; SC 226: 204).
- 74 Origen refers to Gal. 5:17. On his conception of first movements, see Layton (2000); Sorabji (2001: 346–351).
- 75 See Origen, *In Matthew* 90, 92 (*Matthew* 26:36–39). See Sorabji (2001: 346–351), Knuutila (2004: 123–125).
- 76 See Epictetus, *Disc.* I.1.7 and the comment in Görgemanns and Karpp (1992: 469, n. 12).
- 77 Evagrius, *On Thoughts* 2.1–11, *Practical Treatise* 40.4–10.
- 78 Cf. Seneca, *De ira* II.4.
- 79 τούτους πάντα [that is, the thoughts, *logismous*] παρενοχλεῖν μὲν τῇ ψυχῇ ἢ μὴ παρενοχλεῖν, τῶν οὐκ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν ἐστί. τὸ δὲ χρονίζειν αὐτοὺς ἢ μὴ χρονίζειν, ἢ πάθη κινεῖν ἢ μὴ κινεῖν, τῶν ἐφ’ ἡμῖν (that these [thoughts] will distract us or not is not up to us, but whether they linger on us or not and whether they stir a passion or not, this is up to us; Evagrius, *Practical Treatise* 6). Cf. Evagrius, *On Thoughts* 2, 3, 36. See further Sorabji (2001: 358–360).

- 80 *Practical Treatise* 8.1–3. Evagrius advises that we should be on our guard (*phylattein*) in order to maintain the essential freedom of our intellect (*On Thoughts* 25).
- 81 I owe this reference to Johannes Steenbuch.
- 82 ἄνθρωπον ἀρχὴν εἶναι τῶν ἰδίων ἔργων καὶ αὐτεξούσιον (*De nat. hom.* 39, 113).
- 83 *De nat. hom.* 39, 113–114; cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* III.5. See the discussion in Streck (2005: 94–95).
- 84 ὅταν οὖν ψυχὴ κράσει σώματος ἐνδοῦσα ἐπιθυμίας ἢ θυμοῖς ἑαυτὴν ἐκδῶ ἢ ἀπὸ τῶν τυχερῶν καταπιεσθῆ ἢ χαννωθῆ, οἷον πενίας ἢ πλούτου, ἐκούσιον κακὸν ὑφίσταται. ἢ γὰρ μὴ ἐνδοῦσα κατορθοῖ καὶ νικᾷ τὸ δύσκρατον, ὡς ἀλλοιώσασαι μᾶλλον ἢ ἀλλοιωθῆναι, καὶ καθίστησι τὰς ψυχικὰς διαθέσεις εἰς εὐεξίαν ἀγωγῆς χρηστῆ καὶ διαίτη προσφόρου. (So when the soul gives in to the bodily temperament and abandons itself to desires and anger, or is oppressed or puffed up by chance circumstances, such as poverty or wealth, voluntary evil comes into being. For the soul that does not give in corrects and conquers the poor temperament, so that it alters rather than is altered and sets its psychic dispositions into a good state by good behaviour and a favourable regime; *De nat. hom.* 116.17–23, trans. Sharples and Van der Eijk, mod.) Cf. Galen, *Quod animi mores* I.4, III.4.
- 85 Nemesius mentions Galen in his work, e.g. Galen's *De usu partium* at *De nat. hom.* 123. See Sharples and Van der Eijk (2008: 199, n. 969).
- 86 For a discussion of Basil's account of free will, see Amand (1945: 393–400) and Hegedus (2007: 30–31).
- 87 Proclus considers wickedness as parasitic on goodness, a view that ps-Dionysius takes over (he speaks of *παρυπόστασις*; *On Divine Names* 4.31). Similar is the view of Gregory of Nyssa, *De hom. opif.* 164A.
- 88 *On Holy Spirit* 12.28, 15.36.
- 89 See Mosshammer (1990). Athanasius took the same view on this topic; see *C. Gentes* 2.1–16, 7.1–3.
- 90 On freedom of choice in Gregory, see further Amand (1945: 405–435), Gaith (1953), and Dal Toso (1998).
- 91 Καὶ ἔσμεν ἑαυτῶν τρόπον τινὰ πατέρες, ἑαυτοὺς οἷους ἂν ἐθέλωμεν τίκτοντες καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς ἰδίας προαιρέσεως εἰς ὅπερ ἂν ἐθέλωμεν εἶδος, ἢ ἄρρεν θῆλυ, τῷ τῆς ἀρετῆς ἢ κακίας λόγῳ διαπλασσόμενοι (And we are in a sense fathers of ourselves, in the sense that we make ourselves as we wish and out of our own will and to whatever form we want, man or woman, shaping ourselves through virtue or vice) (*Vita Mosis* 328B). Cf. *De an.* 120C.
- 92 There is a good study of Gregory's treatise by Motta (2008). Cf. the analysis of Amand (1945: 423–430).

# 5

## PSYCHOLOGY

### The soul and its relation to the body

#### Introduction: the philosophical agenda

Christians share the generally agreed thesis among philosophers in antiquity that animals, including humans, consist of soul (*psychē*) and body (*sōma*) and that the soul accounts for life and all living functions of a living body, such as nourishment, perception, and movement. They also agree that the soul includes a part or a faculty that accounts for thinking and related functions such as memory, for instance, that is, the intellect (*nous*). Plato speaks of the rational part of the soul in *Republic* IV and as a special, intellectual, and immortal kind of soul in *Timaeus* (41cd, 69cd, 89e–90a); Aristotle speaks of the intellect as the part of the soul that knows and understands (*De an.* 429a9–10); the Stoics claim that there is a commanding part (*hēgemonikon*) of the soul (*SVF* II.836), and even the Epicureans appear to distinguish a rational and an irrational part of the soul (Lucretius, *De rerum natura* III.136–142). Agreement among ancient philosophers stops here, however. There was much disagreement among them about the nature of the soul and also about its relation to, and operation in, the body.<sup>1</sup> Let us look more closely at the points of disagreement, which the Christians inherit and on which they need to take position.

If we take the issue of the nature of the soul first, ancient philosophers were divided as to whether the soul is of intelligible or of sensible nature. Plato and Aristotle maintained that the soul is a non-material, intelligible entity, while Stoics and Epicureans argued instead that the soul is a corporeal entity. The agreement, however, between the partisans of the one and the other view was limited, as they disagreed on the kind of intelligible or corporeal entity that the soul is. Plato famously has Socrates arguing in the *Phaedo* that the soul is independent of the body, indestructible, and immortal (see, e.g., *Phaedo* 80d–e). Plato does indicate, though, that these views are debatable by having Simmias and Cebes carefully argue against them in the same dialogue. Aristotle follows on that path and he

departs from the view outlined in the *Phaedo*, that the soul is an intelligible entity that exists separately from the body, although he agrees with the Platonic view that the soul ontologically is an entity distinct from the body and a substance (*De an.* 412b6–9).<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, rather, argues that the soul is a substance in the sense of being the form of the living body, and as such the soul is responsible for the life of such a body and cannot exist without it (*De an.* 414a13–28). On the other side of the spectrum there is disagreement between Stoics and Epicureans about the corporeal character of the soul, on which they agree; the former maintain that the soul is a kind of breath (*pneuma*) that permeates and connects all parts of the human body, while the Epicureans insist that the soul consists of atoms, like everything else, and is thus perishable.<sup>3</sup> All the above views, except for the Epicurean, had a strong impact on the thought of early Christian philosophers on the nature of the soul. There is one point, however, on which everyone agrees, which was from early on highlighted by Plato – namely, that the soul is our self (*heautos*), what one is (*Protagoras* 313ab).

Closely related to the question regarding the nature of the soul is the one of how the soul functions in the body, that is, how the soul makes us grow, move, digest, perceive, and so on; how the soul makes us desire things, get angry or tempted and also how it constrains us from giving into our desires. An answer to this question involves a view as to what kind of principle the soul is, that is, whether the soul is a unity that is responsible for all living functions or the soul has parts or faculties, each of which accounts for different living functions. In the *Phaedo* the soul is sometimes spoken of as an entity responsible for all living functions and at other times as an entity responsible primarily for mental functions such as thinking and perceiving (*Phaed.* 65ad, 81be, 83bc). In later Platonic dialogues such as the *Republic* (439c–441a), the soul is responsible for all living functions, including desires and affections. Plato now distinguishes three parts of the soul: the appetitive, the spirited, and the rational part. Later on, in the *Timaeus*, Plato even speaks of different kinds (*genos, eidos*) of soul,<sup>4</sup> mortal and immortal (69cd, 73c); as immortal is considered the rational part of the soul, or the intellect, which is said to be divine. For this reason this kind of soul is separated from the other parts, being located in the head, while the mortal parts are located below the neck (*Tim.* 69de).<sup>5</sup> For Aristotle and the Stoics the intellect is also a part of soul, but this does not amount to agreement with the Platonic view.<sup>6</sup> Aristotle, for instance, does not distinguish as sharply between intellectual functions and other living functions as Plato does: the intellect is for him another part of the soul only in the sense of being another ability or faculty of the soul. The Stoics, on the other hand, consider what they call the commanding part of the soul (*hēgemonikon*) not just one part but the most authoritative one (D.L. VII.159), which rules over and connects all the other parts of the soul. The question, of course, is how these positions inform their accounts of how the soul operates in the body and how the soul accounts for such diverse living functions as nutrition, growth, movement, perception, and thinking.

There is a set of complex issues here, namely how the soul performs so many different tasks and what kind of presence the soul has in the body in order to do



so. One answer to this question is the Aristotelian one, according to which the soul operates in the body through faculties by means of which it administers the body and carries out its various functions (*De an.* 414a29–34). On this view, the soul is the entity that gives form, structure, and organization to the body so that it becomes and remains living. This organization entails that all parts of the living body contribute to its being alive by carrying out their respective roles, in the same sense that in a ship, in a car, or in a computer all parts are organized in such a way as to make them capable of functioning as such. The theory of the soul operating through faculties was influential enough to be taken over by Platonists in late antiquity, despite the fact that they rejected Aristotle's view of the soul's nature as actuality of the body.<sup>7</sup> But the question, then, is whether the soul is a mere cluster of faculties or one of those faculties is more important and prevailing than the others, as the Stoics argued for the commanding part of the soul. This question had repercussions concerning the issue of the immortality of the soul, defended by Plato, most notably in the *Phaedo* and later in the *Timaeus*. Platonists in late antiquity are guided especially by the *Timaeus* in maintaining that only the rational part of the soul is strictly speaking immortal, that is, everlastingly living. Platonists arrived at this position also after being challenged by Peripatetics such as Strato and Boethus, who argued that the soul is immortal only in the sense that it does not admit corruption or death, since the soul as an intelligible entity does not admit any affection.<sup>8</sup>

Platonists had one additional problem, that is to explain how, when, and especially why the soul enters the body, given their assumption of the soul's pre-existence (maintained in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*). These were crucial questions for the Platonists, because for them the so-called descent of the soul to the body was a failure or, worse, something bad, since the soul loses its freedom when embodied and becomes constrained by the body and its desires. Plotinus discusses this question and lists a number of possible answers (*Enn.* IV.3.9), while Porphyry wrote a treatise to address a part of this question.<sup>9</sup> In it he argues that the soul actually enters the human body not as an embryo nor even as a newborn child, as the Stoics maintained (*SVF* II.806), but later in life in the form of an intellect. Such a thesis, however, suggests that Porphyry conceives of the soul as an entity responsible not primarily for life but for intellectual functions. This is the view of the soul that Plotinus also has:<sup>10</sup> the soul is not responsible for the biological functions of the living human body but mainly for the intellectual functions, such as perception and memory; for the biological functions it is the human nature that is responsible (*Enn.* I.1.6). This view resonates with the view of Plotinus that the human soul does not dwell completely in the human body but remains in the intelligible realm and is only causally active in the body.<sup>11</sup> There is also the closely related question regarding the status of the embryo: animal or plant?<sup>12</sup> Platonists, Stoics, medical authors such as Soranus and Galen, and also Christian authors, as we shall see, develop views on that. It is noticeable that Clement takes up this very issue in order to show how demonstration should be practised (*Strom.* VIII.3.9).

While Hellenic philosophers in late antiquity were elaborating the positions of their school authorities in order to respond to criticisms, to accommodate data from the sciences, and to make their positions philosophically more sophisticated, Christian philosophers had some rudimentary views in the Scriptures as their starting point. Such statements include that of Genesis, according to which “God breathed into Adam’s nostrils the spirit of life” (Gen. 2:7), those of Jesus complaining that “my soul is troubled” (John 12:27) or “my soul is sorrowful even unto death” (Matthew 26:38), or “no one takes the soul from me but I lay it down of myself” (John 10:18), or the statement made by Jesus when he dies that he lays into his father’s hand his spirit (Luke 23:46). Clearly, these passages neither make up, nor presuppose, nor even point to, a particular theory regarding the nature of the soul and its relation to, and function in, the body; rather, they can fit into the diverse theories of the soul advanced by Hellenic philosophers. Not all these conflicting theories can be right, however, as the Christians themselves argued. Early Christians differ considerably in their critical attitudes towards Hellenic theories of the soul. Justin, Origen, Eusebius, and Gregory of Nyssa distance themselves implicitly or explicitly from the Hellenistic theories of soul, while Tertullian is more critical towards Plato and draws much on the Stoic theory of soul instead. This feature is evidence to the effect that it was the task of early Christian thinkers to determine what the best theory about the nature and the function of the soul was and how to defend it from their own, Christian, point of view. This was a philosophical task that could be carried out only by philosophical means. Origen points eloquently to this situation in the preface of his *On Principles*:

In regard to the soul, whether it takes its rise from the transference of the seed (*ex seminis traduce ducatur*), in such a way that the principle itself (*ratio ipsius*) or substance of the soul may be regarded as inherent in the seminal particles of the body itself; or whether it has some other beginning, and whether this beginning is begotten or unbegotten, or, at any rate, whether it is imparted to the body from outside or not, all this is not very clearly defined in the teaching.

(*Princ.* pref. 5)

Origen writes as if he is trying to map out the territory of the competing theoretical views about the soul that Christian philosophers were considering in an effort to develop their own views. Origen makes a selection of three main positions from the many that were available at the time. He distinguishes a materialist view, according to which the soul develops out of semen, and the view that the soul comes from elsewhere and is either created or uncreated. The first point of view has affinities with the Stoic doctrine and especially with Tertullian’s position later known as traducianism, while the second and third views are closer to the Aristotelian and Platonic positions respectively.

It is interesting to note that Origen presents us with a puzzle, an *aporia*, in the preface of his *On Principles*, and the question is: what is the point of such a puzzle?<sup>13</sup>

As it becomes clear in the same treatise, the question of the nature of the human soul is crucial because it bears significantly on many other important philosophical issues for the Christians. One of them is the nature of man, of which the soul was widely believed to be an essential part. The question of what kind of entity human is bears in turn on the question of how humans related to God, since, according to Scripture, God created humans in the image of God. The question about human nature, then, raises the question as to the precise element of similarity between God and man. As we have seen in the previous chapter, one similarity between God and man was considered to be the ability to choose freely. This last issue bears, in turn, on the question of how humans should live so that they can attain happiness and become like God. As we have seen in Chapter 2, early Christians maintained that God created the world for the sake of humans, so that they come to know God, become similar to him, and reach salvation. We see, then, that several strands of thought converge in the question about the nature of humans and much is at stake. This is why Origen, I take it, highlights the issue of the human soul in the preface of *On Principles*, and this is why he devotes much energy in taking a clear view on that. In doing so, Origen follows a tradition of Christian thinkers who wrote entire treatises on the human soul, like Justin and Tertullian, or discussed the matter extensively, as Irenaeus did, taking issue with the relevant Gnostic views, mainly those of the Valentinians.

### **Man's tripartite nature: body, soul, and spirit – Justin, Theophilus, Irenaeus**

However vague the scriptural statements may be about human nature and the human soul more specifically, early Christians do take them as starting points for their theorizing. There are some scriptural statements suggesting a threefold distinction of body, soul, and spirit (*pneuma*), such as 1 Thessalonians 5:23.<sup>14</sup> Justin Martyr already employs this distinction and he initiates a way of thinking that is adopted by several later Christian philosophers, including Origen. According to this way of thinking, the soul is a mediate entity between body and spirit, and the question is in what sense this is the case. Justin sets out to clarify this in his *Dialogue with Trypho*. He claims that the soul is not identical with life, nor is it the source of life; rather, Justin continues, the soul participates in life, which in his view means that it is something other than life. The spirit, however, he argues, is essentially life, which is why he calls it “living” (*zōtikon*; cf. *pnoēn zoēs*; Gen. 2:7) As the body is dependent on soul, similarly, he says, the soul is dependent on spirit, which is the only part of man that is life essentially. I quote the relevant passage:

The soul, then, either is life or has life. If it is life, it would make something else live, not itself, as is the case with change that changes something other than itself. Nobody would deny that the soul lives. If it lives, it does not live as life would, but by participating (*metalambanousa*) in life. The thing that participates is different from that which is participated in. The soul, then,

participates in life because God wants it to live. It is in this way and not by participation in life at a time when God does not want the soul to live. For living is not a characteristic feature (*idiōma*) of soul, as it is of God. But as man does not exist eternally, neither is the soul joined with the body forever, but when this harmony should dissolve, the soul leaves the body and man does not exist any longer. In this way, when the soul no longer exists, the living spirit (*zōtikon pneuma*) departs from it and the soul does not exist any longer, but it goes again to the place where it is taken from.

(*Dial.* 6.1–2)

Justin's claim that soul is not identical with life but rather participates in life is strikingly different from the definitions of soul as cause and principle of life by Hellenic philosophers.<sup>15</sup> The question is why Justin departs from such a widespread and respected position. In my view, there are two reasons for this. The first is that Justin is inspired by statements in Scripture which suggest a tripartite human nature, according to which the spirit (*pneuma*), and not the soul, is essentially responsible for life (e.g. Gen. 2:7, Luke 23:46), and also by statements to the effect that only God is immortal strictly speaking, that is, by his own nature (1 Tim. 6:16). The second reason may be that God is a living being and a spirit (*pneuma*), and this must be sufficient for explaining God's life, given the evidence of passages such as the ones cited above, which suggest that the spirit is responsible for life. If man is created similar to God, then the spirit must be the cause of man's life, too.

Justin, however, does not make clear in the above passage or elsewhere in his extant writings what the nature of the soul is and how it participates in life. He merely argues that it is God who makes the soul living and he also maintains that the spirit is life while the soul cannot live without it. Justin leaves it unclear how God and spirit contribute so that the soul acquires life. Besides, in other parts of his work Justin speaks only of soul and body (*Dial.* 105.3–4; 1 *Apol.* 8.4).<sup>16</sup> We can reach a better understanding of Justin's view on human nature and human soul, however, if we take a closer look at the context of the passage cited above.

Justin discusses with Trypho, the Jew, whether man is akin to God through one's soul or through the intellect (*nous*), and the latter suggestion is favoured on the following grounds. Souls, it is argued, do not see God, neither do they continue to live in other bodies after the body's death, as some philosophers falsely assumed, and it is specified that the philosophers in question are Platonists (*Dial.* 5.1). Justin argues that their belief that the soul is immortal cannot be right, because the soul can be immortal only if it is uncreated (*agennētos*). Justin takes the view that the soul is an entity similar to the world in the *Timaeus*, where we are told that the world is by its nature subject to corruption but it will not be corrupted because God's will prevents that (*Tim.* 41ab; *Dial.* 5.4). If the world is created, Justin contends, the souls also are created, that is, God brought them into being so that humans and other living beings could exist as worldly entities. But if souls are created, they cannot be immortal by their own nature, as God is. If souls were uncreated by nature, then they would not be subject to change, such as sin. But, as we know, souls do

sin and thus change. Souls then, Justin claims, are created as any other entities that are subject to change, but they are still imperishable because of God's will (*Dial.* 5.4–5). It is in this context that Justin comes to argue that the soul is neither identical with, nor a principle of, life, but rather has life only through participation in spirit and because God wishes so.

One crucial reason, then, why God wishes that the soul participates in life is that souls can thus receive reward and punishment. Justin insists that the soul remains sensate after death so that it can experience punishment for the sins committed when it was embodied (1 *Apol.* 18.2–4, 20.4). Before I comment further on Justin's view, let me come back to the passage of *Timaeus* to which Justin appeals (41ab)<sup>17</sup> and which weighs much in the thought of other early Christians, such as Theophilus. This passage is construed as showing that God, through his will, can change the character of an entity from perishable to imperishable, and the world is one such case. We know that Aristotle in *De caelo* (297b17–283b22) strongly criticized Plato for making such a step in the *Timaeus*. Aristotle criticized Plato for maintaining that the world is everlasting while it is created, arguing that God cannot change the natural order, since God, rather, is precisely the cause of that order. The Christians, however, found attractive the Platonic idea of God's transforming the world from perishable into virtually imperishable, because they wanted to deny that God's creation of humanity amounts to humans being mortal like every other created entity. As we saw in the previous chapter, they rather suggested that God is willing to assist man to transcend human nature, attain immortality, and thus become similar to God – that is, deified.

Christians appear conscious of the distinctive character of this view, which is different from that of Platonists on the one hand, who maintain a naturally or essentially immortal human soul, and the view of Peripatetics and Epicureans on the other, who believe in different ways that the soul does not survive death. Theophilus highlights the distinctive character of the Christian view when he says that most people believe that the soul is immortal on the grounds that "God breathed into man's face the breath of life" (Gen. 2.7; *Ad Autol.* II.19), yet the Christian view is that man is neither mortal nor immortal; rather man is created of such a nature that can attain immortality (*Ad Autol.* II.27). Most probably, Theophilus refers here to fellow Christians, perhaps Christian Platonists, and it is their view he rejects. Tatian and Irenaeus will make that explicit, as we shall see presently. Of course, Theophilus has a specific view as to what counts as immortality of the soul. This is conferred immortality, that is, immortality bestowed by God, as he explains (II.27).

To come back to Justin's view of the human nature, one question we need to address is how the human soul relates to spirit and to God. Justin appears to maintain that the soul is dependent on God on the one hand and on spirit, the *pneuma*, on the other. This can work only if there is some close relation between God and spirit. Justin may be taken as implying such a relation. In his second *Apology*, Justin speaks of Christ who became incarnate like humans and he suggests that Christ appeared on earth for our sakes as body, soul, and *logos* (2 *Apol.* 10.1). Justin goes on to claim that the incarnation of God amounts to the embodiment of *Logos* in Christ

(2 *Apol.* 10.1),<sup>18</sup> who has also been operating in the world before incarnation, inspiring ancient philosophers such as Plato (2 *Apol.* 10.4–8). In this passage, *logos* clearly substitutes spirit, *pneuma*. One needs to distinguish here, though, between the *logos* as an element of the human constitution and the *Logos* of God, Christ. Justin does not make clear what the relation is between the two in this context. One possibility is that the element of *logos* of the human constitution derives from the *Logos* of God. This is possible in light of the view that Justin voices in *Dialogue with Trypho* (61.4) that in every man there is a seed of *logos*, which makes sense if the divine *Logos* is meant. We find a similar story in Plutarch, who also maintains a tripartite human constitution of body, soul, and intellect and also suggests that the intellect is of divine nature (Plutarch, *De facie* 943A; *De genio Socratis* 591DE).<sup>19</sup> If this is the case, then Justin maintains a sequence of participation, namely the soul participates in the spirit and thus becomes living, and the spirit participates in God.

Tatian inherits Justin's overall views and the problems pertaining to it. Tatian argues in his usual polemical tenor against the view of Hellenic philosophers, that is, mainly Platonists as it turns out, that the soul is not in itself immortal but rather mortal and yet it has the power to escape death (*Or.* 13.1). Earlier on in his work Tatian has distinguished between two kinds of spirit, "one of which is called soul, but the other is greater than the soul; it is the image and likeness of God" (12.1). Tatian suggests that the spirit (*pneuma*) comes to the aid of the soul and saves it (13.2), and he sets as our task in life to link our soul to spirit and thus work towards our union with God (15.1). Tatian makes clear what Justin implied, namely that the spirit in us is identical with God and our soul is saved through it, that is, through its participation to it. Tatian differs from Justin, though, in claiming that the soul is also ignorant and in itself is darkness, since it has a natural affinity to matter (13.2–3).<sup>20</sup> This is reminiscent of the idea in the *Timaeus* (34a–36e) that the world-soul becomes rational and orderly when informed by the divine intellect, which Platonists like Numenius interpreted by suggesting the affinity between disorderly world-soul and matter (fr. 52.37–65 Des Places).<sup>21</sup>

A position similar to Justin's is upheld also by Irenaeus.<sup>22</sup> Yet his emphasis is different. Irenaeus stresses that human nature consists of three elements – body, soul, and spirit – and all three are important for the human constitution. Irenaeus makes this point against the Valentinians, who accepted three classes of humans – spiritual, psychic, and earthly (*Adv. Haer.* I.6.1–3, I.7.5) – and in each of which one element of the human nature is predominant, the spirit in the spiritual humans, the soul in the psychic ones, and the body in the earthly ones. Irenaeus argues against them that they misinterpret the passage in Paul's 1 Thessalonians 5:23, which makes clear that all three aspects are always present in human nature and all of them contribute to make a human complete. The passage below encapsulates Irenaeus' position.

Now soul and spirit can only be parts of man, not the entire man. For the perfect man is the mixture and unity of the soul that has taken over the spirit of the Father and has mixed with the body according to the image of God . . . the soul by itself is not man, but it is the soul of man and part of

man. Neither is the spirit man, for it is called spirit and not man. It is their mixture and union that makes man complete.

(*Adv. Haer.* V.6.1)

Irenaeus has two critical targets: on the one hand he criticizes the Valentinian view according to which man is essentially identical with the spirit, and on that view this is the only aspect of humanity that will be saved (*Adv. Haer.* I.5.5). This means that only the spiritual people are essentially similar to God (II.29.3). Irenaeus opposes that view strongly. As we have seen in the previous chapter (pp. 144–146), he maintains that there are no degrees in man's similarity with God to the extent that all humans share the same nature, which consists of three aspects, body, soul, and spirit, and to the extent that they have all received God's spirit equally (IV.4.3, IV.38.11). For Irenaeus human nature is one and universal, made in God's likeness (V.6.1). Irenaeus, however, may also target Platonist views, which have some affinity with the Valentinian ones, as I will explain.

The Valentinian doctrine that man consists of body, soul, and spirit and that the latter is the most elevated element in human constitution was presumably inspired by passages in Scripture such as 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and Luke 23:46, but support to it can be lent also by the *Timaeus*, where Plato also distinguishes between body, mortal irrational soul, and immortal rational soul (*Tim.* 41cd, 69ce), that is the intellect (44a), which is the highest and most divine element in us (69de, 73a, 90a). This doctrine takes different forms and interpretations in contemporary Platonists. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter (p. 173), Plutarch distinguishes body, soul, and intellect in human nature, and highlights the superiority of the latter, while Numenius is more radical in that he maintains that man is essentially reason and should be identified with the intellect, while psychic abilities, such as the appetitive, the emotional, and the perceptual, come about when the soul enters the body, since they are needed for the proper functioning of the living body (fr. 43 Des Places).<sup>23</sup> Following the *Timaeus*, Numenius apparently maintained that only the intellect is immortal strictly speaking (frs. 31.25–26, 41.15–16 Des Places). This position is adopted by Plotinus and Porphyry, who distinguish between a higher, intellectual soul, and a lower soul, and they consider both to be immortal, yet in a different sense; while the former is immortal in the sense that it continues to exist after its departure from the body since it is essentially an intellect like the divine one, the latter is immortal in the sense that it does not admit death but its elements return to the universe from which they came.<sup>24</sup> The Christian view of a tripartite human constitution is similar in that human spirit is of a more sublime nature than the soul and is essentially immortal in virtue of participating in the divine nature, while the soul has only a conferred immortality through its participation in the spirit.

Irenaeus is critical of the Platonist view of the soul being an uncreated, eternal entity. He explicitly endorses the view of Justin and Theophilus that the human soul is created (*Adv. Haer.* V.12.2), which means that immortality is not natural to the soul, as is suggested in Plato's *Phaedo*, but rather a divine gift (II.34.2).

As Irenaeus says, it is not the soul itself that is immortal but it is the will of God that immortalizes it (*secundum voluntatem Factoris Dei*; II.34.2). This is exactly the view of Theophilus (*Ad Autol.* II.27). Irenaeus argues openly both against the Platonic view of the immortality of the soul and against the equally Platonic view of the transmigration of the soul (II.33.1–4, 34.1; *Tim.* 90e–91e, *Laws* 872e, 940ae). The thrust of Irenaeus' argument takes the form of a hypothetical syllogism. If the soul had lived a previous life, it would remember something of its previous existence, given that the soul remembers all kinds of things that it learns; this, however, is not the case, as the soul has no recollection of any previous life, which means that the belief in an eternally living soul that lives many lives is implausible. Apparently Irenaeus does not accept Plato's argument of recollection in the *Meno* as evidence of the soul's past life, presumably because in his view this argument does not establish that the soul has memories of a previous life but only a certain kind of knowledge, which does not necessarily suggest a soul's past life.

Irenaeus differs from Platonist views of human nature also in maintaining a closer relation between soul and body than Plato suggests in dialogues like the *Phaedo* or the *Phaedrus*. The soul, he argues, rules over the body in the way the artist masters an instrument (*Adv. Haer.* II.33.4); as the artist makes the instrument participate in what he does, Irenaeus suggests, so the soul makes the body participant in all its activities. The soul unites with the body and imparts life to it and yet the soul continues to have its own proper activities, such as that of contemplation, memory, and knowledge. We are reminded here of Plotinus, who, as I mentioned, considers the soul mainly responsible for intellectual and not biological functions of the human living body, arguing that the soul never really and fully descends to the body. While explaining how sense-perception occurs, for instance, Plotinus argues that the body transmits the Form to the soul to judge it (*Enn.* IV.3.26.1–8), because only the soul can carry out such a function. Irenaeus, however, not only wants to maintain the ontological priority of soul to body, namely the view that the soul shapes the body making it a body able to carry out intellectual operations, as Plotinus and other contemporary Platonists maintained, but he also wants to defend the view that the body is of such nature that it collaborates and assists the soul (II.33.3–4). Irenaeus claims that the soul carries out mental functions such as sense-perception, thought, and focus (*sensus, cogitatio, intentio mentis*; *Adv. Haer.* II.29.3) without the body opposing them but rather assisting. If that is the case, then the body is not an obstacle to the soul, as some Platonists thought, but rather an ally.

But if it is the soul that accounts for all these functions of the living body, the question that arises is what the function of the spirit is. For Irenaeus the spirit is not responsible for any effect or function of the living body other than making human nature God-like (*Adv. Haer.* V.7.1, V.9.1). And human nature is God-like in so far as it is shaped by reason (V.1.3).<sup>25</sup> This transformation of human nature is due to the spirit. Relying on I Cor. 15:46 and Gen. 2:7, Irenaeus claims that man first was ensouled and then God's spirit was imparted (V.12.1), which



means that the spirit presupposes the existence of the soul (II.29.3). With the imparting of spirit, the entire human nature is transformed and becomes rational, and for this reason the entire human nature, including the body, has value and will be saved in its entirety. In the same way that the soul transforms the body, the spirit transforms both soul and body. For Irenaeus the incarnation of God shows precisely that God embraces the entire human nature, including the body, and glorifies it (II.22.4).<sup>26</sup> Christ was incarnated so that he saves us also as bodies, that is, our bodies will be resurrected (V.3, V.6.1). This view about the human body is a distinctive Christian one. The significance of the body within human nature is now highlighted in Christian thought, while it was systematically undervalued in contemporary Platonism and Gnosticism. As we shall see below (pp. 185–195), Athanasius and Gregory of Nyssa will also emphasize the role of the body even further, and they do so in the light of the incarnation of God's *Logos*.

### Reactions to the tripartite human nature: Tertullian, Athenagoras, Clement

We have seen so far that for Justin, Tatian, Theophilus, and Irenaeus the soul is a created entity and yet an intelligible one; also, it is a mediating entity between body and spirit in the sense that the soul is given life from the spirit and in turn enlivens the body and in this sense the soul becomes immortal through the spirit, which is the divine element in us. Not all Christians agreed with this view, however. Both Tertullian and Clement, who are contemporaries, maintain a bipartite view of human nature, consisting only of soul and body. And both of them subscribe to the originally Aristotelian view that the soul has faculties, one of which is the rational faculty. Tertullian, however, takes the view that the human soul is essentially God's spirit, breathed to man when created. For all of them, as well as for Athenagoras, the intellect or reason is an element of human nature originating from God that shapes the entire human nature. Let me start with Tertullian.

Tertullian set out to investigate systematically the nature and function of the soul in his work *On the Soul* (*De anima*), the first preserved Christian work on the subject.<sup>27</sup> He confesses that he composed this work in order to contradict the relevant views of Hermogenes and Valentinus (*De an.* 3.1, 12.1).<sup>28</sup> As we have seen, already Irenaeus was motivated by a polemical attitude against the Valentinian Gnostics in his account on the soul. Tertullian, however, states at the beginning of his treatise that he will go beyond polemics and that he will discuss questions about the soul that ancient philosophers had examined, since he already responded to the view of Hermogenes about the nature of the soul (*De an.* 1.1). If this is the case, why does Tertullian refer to Hermogenes' view again? What is this view that so preoccupied Tertullian?

From all we know, Hermogenes developed a theory about the nature of the human soul in order to support a theory of human freedom of choice. On the basis

of Tertullian's criticism in *De anima*, we can reconstruct Hermogenes' theory of the human soul as follows. Hermogenes probably argued:

- (a) that human souls do sin
- (b) that God breathed into Adam the spirit of life, which, however, cannot sin, since it stems from God
- (c) hence the spirit of life is not essential to the soul but an accident to it
- (d) the higher faculties of the soul form part of this spirit of life
- (e) thus the higher faculties of the soul are accidental to it.<sup>29</sup>

Hermogenes' argument rests on a particular reading of the text of Genesis 2:7: he reads *pneuma zoēs* instead of *pnoēn zoēs*, and he, like Justin, Tatian, and Irenaeus, distinguishes sharply between soul and spirit. Tertullian defends the latter reading, which allows him to identify spirit (*spiritus*) and soul (*anima*). The following passage is telling for the position Tertullian takes against Hermogenes:

But the nature of my present inquiry obliges me to call the soul spirit/breath (*spiritum*), since breathing is ascribed to another substance. We, however, claim this [function] for the soul, which we acknowledge to be an indivisible simple substance, and therefore we must call it spirit in a definitive sense, not because of its condition but of its action, not in respect of its nature but of its function, that is; because it respire and not because it is spirit strictly speaking. For to blow or breathe, is to respire. Similarly in the case of the soul; we are driven to describe the soul by the term that indicates this respiration, namely spirit, on account of its action, breath. Moreover, we especially insist on calling it spirit/breath, in opposition to Hermogenes who derives the soul from matter instead of from the breath of God (*flatus dei*).

(*De anima* 11.1)

As the passage makes clear, Tertullian identifies soul and spirit. His argument is that the soul must be responsible for breathing, which is an essential function for the living beings; if this is the case, then the soul must amount to spirit, which accounts for respiration, and this spirit stems from the breath of God. This is a shortened version of the argument against Hermogenes' view, which he outlines in the preceding chapter of *De anima* (10), and which runs as follows:

- (a) breathing is proper to living
- (b) this is the case for all living beings
- (c) thus living and breathing are identical, "to live is to breathe"
- (d) if this is so, both living and breathing are proper to the substance responsible for living, namely soul
- (e) thus life and breath/spirit (*spiritus*) are one substance because they cannot be divided

Hence, he concludes,

(f) soul and spirit are one substance.

Tertullian then distinguishes only two parts in man, body and spirit/soul, and he remains loyal to this view also elsewhere in his work (e.g. *De paenitentia* III.4). His argument, however, suggests that Tertullian maintains the unity of soul and spirit not their identity, as the cited passage above suggests. And, if this is the case, there is then a question about the sense in which soul and spirit make up a unity. Tertullian does address this question. He claims that the unity of soul and spirit is like that of day and light; the two are not identical but the one, namely day, exists because the other, light, exists. One would argue here that this is not a case of identity but a relation of ontological dependence, since the one entity (light, spirit) is a necessary and sufficient condition for the existence of the other (day, soul). Tertullian, however, claims that the two substances differ in terms of their operations or functions (*distinguunt substantias opera; De an.* 10.9), and on the same token similarity of functions amounts to similarity in substance. And this is, in his view, the case with soul and spirit.

This is a debatable claim. But, however this is, we still wonder about how exactly Tertullian conceives of the soul as spirit and how such an entity can account for all functions of the living body. Tertullian makes it clear in *De anima* that he is inspired by the Stoic view of the soul. The belief in the identity of breath and life are attested for Chrysippus, Antipater, and Diogenes of Babylon (*SVF* II.249, 838, 879); it was they who defined the soul as spirit (*pneuma*), a corporeal entity.<sup>30</sup> Tertullian, on his own admission (*De an.* 4.3), also draws on Soranus, a physician, a generation younger than Tertullian, who became famous for his work on the female body and its diseases. Tertullian uses Soranus' work *On the Soul*, which is no longer extant and of which Tertullian is our best source.<sup>31</sup> It is actually possible that Tertullian draws on the Stoics through Soranus, who himself was influenced by their psychology.<sup>32</sup>

Soranus is not the only medical authority Tertullian uses, however. In his argument in *De anima* 10 he also refers to the anatomical researches of Herophilus, who was active in Alexandria in the first half of the third century BCE, pointing out that Herophilus could not have discovered the internal structure of the human body if he had examined only corpses because death destroys the physiology of the internal organs. Tertullian then turns against the claim that not all animals have pulmonary organs, which presumably was a criticism fired against the Stoic view that the soul identifies with the spirit and accounts for respiration. He points out again that it is breath that maintains the living body, no matter how it occurs.

It is Tertullian's commitment to the Stoic view of the nature of the soul in *De anima* that leads him to criticize the Platonic doctrine that the soul is an intelligible substance, separable from the body, and pre-existing (*De an.* 4, 6), while he also rejects the Pythagorean and Platonic theory of transmigration of the soul (28–29), as Irenaeus already had.<sup>33</sup> Tertullian also criticizes the Platonic division of the soul

into parts, which is maintained in the *Phaedrus*, the *Republic* and the *Timaeus* (*De an.* 14). The soul, Tertullian argues instead, is a unity that has several faculties through which the soul carries out the various living functions, such as nutrition, growth, movement, and sense-perception (14.3). Thinking, Tertullian argues, is still another function of the soul, and we do not need to postulate an independent entity that is responsible for this function, such as the intellect, as Anaxagoras, Aristotle, and Valentinus did (12).<sup>34</sup> For Tertullian the intellect is another instrument of the soul, as is the sense of sight.

Tertullian's commitment to the Stoic view of the soul as spirit takes him as far as endorsing the Stoic belief in the corporeal nature of the soul, being unique among early Christians in this respect. He argues to this effect citing standard Stoic arguments, such as the similarity of children to parents in psychic profile and the affect that the body can cause on soul (*De an.* 5.4–5; *SVF* I.518, Nemesius *De nat. hom.* 2.76–79). Like the Stoics, Tertullian maintains that the soul is generated as is the body also; it is born (*natum*) and created (*factum*), stemming from God's breath (*De an.* 22.2). More specifically, Tertullian argues that body and soul have a simultaneous origin at the time of conception and that the soul is transmitted from the parents to the child and begins to exist as soon as the embryo is conceived (27.3). The sperm of the male, he suggests, consists of both corporeal and psychic elements; the corporeal element comes from the entire body of the parent, while the psychic is a hot, aerial essence. This is a revival of the Stoic doctrine (*SVF* I.128), found also in Philo (*De opif.* 67; *SVF* II.745). Tertullian's commitment to the Stoic view of the soul is neither surprising nor accidental, but rather part of his overall commitment to Stoic metaphysics; he maintains that everything is corporeal of some kind.<sup>35</sup> Soul and body are different kinds of bodies (*Res.* 33.9) and even God is corporeal (*Adv. Prax.* 7; cf. *SVF* II.526, 527).

Tertullian draws some interesting consequences from his view on the human soul as a corporeal entity stemming from the body of the male parent. The empirical fact that the embryo moves in the mother's womb means that this is ensouled, since the soul was traditionally thought to be the principle of movement. If the soul is already fully present in the embryo, then, he claims, this is a complete human being as is when it is born (*De an.* 25.2–3, 37.2–3);<sup>36</sup> and if this is the case, then, he goes on to claim, abortion is tantamount to murder (25.2–3). This is a novelty in the Graeco-Roman world. It was traditionally believed that the embryo is not yet a complete human being, at least not from the beginning of its conception,<sup>37</sup> which is why there was no legislation that condemned abortion as a crime as such, but only if it was undertaken without the consent of the father.<sup>38</sup> But for Tertullian the essential element of the human being, the soul, which stems directly from God, is already present in the embryo and in this sense it is fully human.

Tertullian's commitment to the view that the soul is corporeal and comes into being at the moment of conception does not mean that he denies its immortality, however, as the Stoics presumably did (Eusebius, *P.E.* XV.20.6; *SVF* II.809; LS 53W). The opposite is the case. The immortality of the soul is an essential feature

of the soul as Tertullian conceives of it. The following passage leaves no room for doubt:

The soul, then, we define to be sprung from the breath of God, immortal, possessing body, having form, simple in its substance, intelligent in its own nature, developing its power in various ways, free in its determinations, subject to changes of accident, in its faculties mutable, rational, supreme, endued with an instinct of presentiment, evolved out of one, archetypal, soul.

(*De anima* 22.2)

One may wonder, though, about the sense in which the soul is immortal, according to Tertullian, since it is of corporeal nature. Here we need to remember that there had been earlier theories of the soul, such as that of Heraclides of Pontus, also maintaining both the corporeality and the immortality of the soul.<sup>39</sup> The crucial point in Tertullian's theory that allows him to bestow the soul with immortality is that the human soul stems from the breath of God. This means that, if man's essence is the soul as God's breath, then man is similar to God. The soul of each human does not spring, however, directly from God, but rather from the first human, whom God created. Since the procreation of mankind amounts to the transmission and perpetuation of the breath of God from one man to another, the human soul is never dying. For Tertullian, then, the soul is immortal only in the sense of being transmitted unceasingly within the mankind preserving God's spirit with it (*De an.* 27.4–6). On the same token the human soul perpetuates the original sin and thus a corrupting element of the initial human nature (*De an.* 41.1–3). This is why, in Tertullian's view, death occurs in mankind. Death is not a natural lot for humans but rather the consequence of sin (*De an.* 52.2).<sup>40</sup> Death as the separation of soul from body is the consequence of man's abandoning God (*De an.* 52.2, *Res.* 19.3).

Similar to Tertullian's is Athenagoras' view of the soul; he distinguishes between soul and body in a way similar to that of Tertullian and he claims that intellect or reason shape both soul and body (*On Resurrection* 15.5–7). Athenagoras' view of the human nature is motivated by his wish to defend the possibility of resurrection. He argues that both the human soul and the human body have benefited from the divine gift of reason and this is why both will enjoy an afterlife, in a resurrected form. The view that reason is a divine gift that permeates human nature, soul and body, brings Athenagoras to condemn abortion, as Tertullian also did. He comes to the issue of abortion while discussing spectacles of homicide and in this context he argues that abortion is similar to homicide. Athenagoras, however, describes the embryo as an animal in the womb (*to kata gastros zōon*), not as a perfect human being, and he speaks of it as a plant that is fed (*Legatio* 35.6). Apparently Athenagoras believes that the embryo is not perfectly ensouled, which means that he takes the soul to acquire more aspects or faculties later in life in order to become a human soul, and probably maintains that man strictly speaking comes into being only when all necessary faculties of the soul come into being. In this case animation is a process that is completed after man's birth. Athenagoras may well be inspired

by the Stoics, who upheld the gradual development of the soul's faculties (*SVF* II.83), but also by Aristotle, who speaks of the development of the embryo.<sup>41</sup> What is distinct, though, is that the process of ensoulment is in his view motivated by the rational element of human nature, which, as I mentioned, shapes both soul and body. We will find this view again, advanced later by Gregory of Nyssa.

Clement of Alexandria also argues that the human soul is a sum of faculties, which man develops progressively, a view partly inspired by Aristotle (*Strom.* II.20.110–113). Among the faculties of the soul Clement counts impulse (*hormē*) and the ability of representation (*phantasia*), which, he claims, all animals have and which motivate us to act, while humans have in addition the rational faculty (*logikē dynamis*; *Strom.* II.20.111.1). By means of that faculty, we, Clement suggests, can distinguish impressions (*diakrinein tas phantasias*) into true and false and thus not be carried away by them (*Strom.* II.20.111.1). This is a crucial aspect of the human soul. For Clement a view of the human soul that does not sufficiently appreciate the human ability to choose does not do justice to what the human soul actually is, that is, a unity responsible for cognition and decision. As we have seen in Chapter 4, Clement considers the ruling, reasoning, part of the soul, the *hēgemonikon*, which has the capacity to choose, the principal element of the soul, to which, as he says, all other faculties are servants (*Strom.* II.16.77.5). This is reminiscent of the Stoic thesis that the ruling part of the soul unifies and connects the entire soul (*SVF* II.836). Clement endorses this conception of the soul because he is concerned to defend human autonomy, man's power of choice. It is this issue that shapes his view of the soul. Human autonomy demands a unified soul by the command of reason.

It is this kind of unity of soul that Clement wants to defend against Gnostic views on the one hand, which maintain that the human soul hosts both good and bad spirits, but also against the Pythagorean/Platonist position of a partite soul (*Strom.* II.20.112.1–114.6). Clement cites Valentinus' thesis that the human soul is like a hostel of spirits and it can only become pure through the presence of God the Son in it. Clement proceeds to ask why God's providence did not equip us with such a soul from the start (II.20.115.1). As we have seen in Chapter 4 (pp. 149–151), the human soul has to choose freely its commitment to Christian faith and it is precisely in this ability of free choice that our similarity to God lies.

## Origen

The nature of man's soul and its connection to the human body becomes central in Origen's thought. This is because Origen realizes the bearing of this issue on several others, such as on cosmogony, on human free will, on ethics and salvation (see Chapters 2, 4, and 6). Origen, however, never wrote a treatise on the soul, as Justin and Tertullian did. The reason for this presumably is that he found the whole subject puzzling.<sup>42</sup> As I mentioned earlier (p. 169), he claims that there is no clear doctrine outlined in Scripture and the competing theories are a cause of puzzlement for him (*Princ.* pref. 5).<sup>43</sup> The first main theoretical option that he lists is traducianism, namely the theory that the soul is transmitted to the body through

the seed of the parents, which Tertullian maintained. Origen mentions further the following options: “whether the soul has some other beginning, and whether this beginning is begotten or unbegotten, or, at any rate, whether it is imparted to the body from outside or not” (*Princ.* pref. 5). Origen explicitly rejects traducianism (*Comm. on the Song* 2.5.23), which means that he considers one of the remaining options. Origen surely accepts that the soul has some beginning, since God is its creator, but the question is what kind of beginning this is and how it is imparted to the body.

The view that the soul was imparted to the body from outside was espoused by several Platonists at that time, including Numenius, Plotinus, and Porphyry. Origen does take after all a position on the nature and function of the soul (see especially *Princ.* II.8), but there is little agreement among scholars on what this position is and how it should be interpreted. One might say that Origen did not make himself sufficiently clear or that he remained puzzled himself until the end. This is actually the case; Origen himself suggests that the whole debate on the soul remains open and unsettled (*Princ.* II.8.4–5). Below I offer a tentative account of Origen’s theory of the soul, highlighting the points debated in scholarship.

Origen maintains that the soul is an intermediate entity between God and body (*Princ.* II.6.3) and that it is a rational entity. It is the soul that allows the incarnation of God’s Son and Wisdom, Christ; for Christ also has a soul (II.6.5). Speaking of the soul of Christ, Origen points out that the Scriptures sometimes speak of Christ’s soul and other times of Christ’s spirit (*pneuma*; *spiritus*). Origen suggests that the two are not essentially distinct but two names for the same entity (II.8.4). This does not mean that Origen sides with Tertullian here. However, he does not side with Justin’s and Irenaeus’ tripartite scheme of human constitution either. Origen rather holds that the human soul in its embodied state is a fallen and failed intellect (*mens*; II.8.3), which he often identifies with the spirit. He joins the ancient tradition in pointing out that the term for soul, *psychē*, reveals that it is a substance formed in the process of cooling when the intellect descends to the body and, he argues, loses its connection to God.<sup>44</sup> This explains, he continues, why the soul is never praised in Scripture.

“The soul which acts according to justice will be saved”, and “the soul which sins will die” [Wisdom of Sirach 6:4]. But we see that Scripture associates the soul with culpability and passes over in silence what is worthy of praise. We need to inquire now how the soul, which, as we can infer from the name itself, namely *psychē*, has received this name, namely because it has been cooled when it lost the heat of the just and of the participation in the divine fire without losing, however, that possibility of ascending again to what it was in the beginning. This, I think, is spoken of by the prophet in the passage [*Psalm* 114:7] “Turn unto thy rest, my soul.” This shows to all of us that the intellect (*mens*) has been degraded in status and dignity and has become what is now called soul. If it restores and corrects itself, it will become intellect again.

(*Princ.* II.8.3)

The passage makes clear that the falling away of the intellect and its becoming a soul does not mean that it also loses its ability to ascend to its initial state as intellect. The soul retains the power to restore itself to its original intellectual state. Before I go further into that, let me note that Origen further states in the same context that this process of falling of the intellect and its becoming a soul is not equal in all cases; rather, he argues, the descent and degradation of the intellect into soul varies from among intellects, since “some intellects retain a portion of their original vigour, while others retain none or only very little” (II.8.4). Origen adduces as empirical evidence for this the fact that some people from their childhood are cleverer than others (*ardentioris acumenis*; II.8.4). But this is exactly what the Valentinians maintained: that human beings are created unequal and only one class of them, the intellectually gifted or *pneumatikoi*, are destined to enjoy salvation. The question, then, is how exactly the intellect becomes degraded and becomes a soul, and how it corrects itself and regains its original status.

Interestingly, Origen qualifies his view about the soul with a note to the effect that this need not be considered as a settled doctrine, but rather as open to enquiry and discussion, and he invites the reader to follow him in doing precisely that (*Princ.* II.8.4, 5). This is indicative of Origen’s philosophical mind; he carries out an enquiry rather than stating a doctrine, and he signals that to the reader. Origen then makes a long digression aiming to show that the differences among humans are the results of the free choices of their intellect before its embodiment in the mortal body. I have talked about this aspect of Origen’s philosophy in the previous chapter about the human will (pp. 152–155). As I said there, Origen argues that God created all intellects equal (II.6.4, II.9.7) but not all of them continued to live in the same way (II.9.6); rather, some deteriorated and became corrupted because they neglected their imitation of God and distanced themselves from God (II.9.6). How are we to understand that?

Origen likens this situation of the intellect to a doctor or a geometer who loses interest in his work over time; as a consequence, his knowledge progressively deteriorates (*Princ.* I.4.1). If someone reacts quickly, it would still be possible to regain knowledge. If not, then all knowledge will vanish and he will cease being a doctor or a geometer any longer; the case is similar, Origen suggests, with the intellects that distance themselves from God because of negligence, and, as a result, they become forgetful and ignorant.<sup>45</sup> Consequently, the fallen intellects adopt bodies suitable to the regions into which they descend, that is, first ethereal bodies and then aerial. Only the soul of Christ has not distanced itself from God, since this is the perfect realization of *Logos*, which is why it is the model for all rational souls (II.6.5, IV.4.4).

Origen explained thus how human intellects developed in different ways and became diverse, while they were all created equal, and how this diversity finally accounts for the diversity of human constitutions and abilities (*Princ.* I.8.1). The intellect in its original state can choose to be rational or non-rational in varying degrees, and this choice also determines its embodiment in a mortal body. It can further choose to remain fallen, or to transform back into an intellect, which



happens when it acquires virtue (II.8.3). The return of the soul to its original, intellectual state is part of Origen's general theory, according to which the initial order of the world will be restored through another cosmic cycle, a view reminiscent of the Stoic doctrine of an innumerable succession of worlds (*SVF* II.599, 623). This restoration will include the human souls, which will be restored in the sense of being purified and will achieve salvation (III.6.3–9).<sup>46</sup>

Let me now focus on an element debated in recent scholarship, namely the intellect's embodiment. Since antiquity, critics attribute to Origen the view of disembodied souls, but it has been claimed repeatedly in recent years that this is not the view that Origen upheld.<sup>47</sup> The existing evidence suggests that Origen most probably held that intellects had spiritual bodies before their fall, which they abandoned in their descent into mortal bodies. Origen speaks of incorporation (*ensōmatōsis*; *In Joh.* 6.85), implying that the fallen intellect uses one single body that is transformed according to the soul's state, while Plotinus describes apparently the same view speaking of the soul's change of bodies (*metensōmatōsis*; *Enn.* IV.3.9.6).<sup>48</sup> The point here is that before their embodiment into mortal bodies intellects are embodied in an ethereal body, a pneumatic vehicle, which is an intermediate between soul and visible body. We actually encounter this theory in Neoplatonists, already in Plotinus and Porphyry, while Iamblichus and Proclus will develop and elaborate this theory further. Origen did not spell out his theory in this regard and he sometimes speaks of souls existing prior to the body.<sup>49</sup> However this is, though, it seems clear that Origen maintained the existence of intellects prior to their embodiment to mortal bodies and he further maintained that the choices and thoughts of the intellects determined their fall into souls and their embodiments into mortal bodies. These actually are not two things but one – namely, the fall of an intellect into the status of soul amounts to its embodiment in a mortal body.<sup>50</sup>

On Origen's view, then, the soul is not a part of man in the same sense that this is for Justin and Irenaeus, but rather is a condition of the intellect, namely a fallen intellect (*Princ.* II.10.2). Presumably for Origen the intellect develops into a soul in its descent to mortal bodies by developing faculties, one of which is reason. As I have mentioned, Origen makes it clear that the soul as such is rational from its conception (*Princ.* I.7.4). And apparently he means not that the human soul has a faculty of reasoning but that it is a certain kind of soul, namely rational. When Origen speaks of the nature of the soul, he mentions both its animating ability and its reasoning ability (I.7.4). The former ability includes in it the capacity for desire, imagination, perception, movement, *hormē* (*Princ.* II.8.1–2), as well as emotions such love, anger, and envy (II.10.5). Despite its fallen character, such a soul is free from the beginning to choose its course of life to the extent that it remains rational; and the descent into body is also a choice made by the soul (I.7.5). It is exactly because Origen conceives of the soul as essentially rational that he rejects Plato's theory of the tripartition of the soul (IV.4.1). In the same context Origen also rejects the tripartite view of human nature (body, soul, spirit), as well the view according to which we have two souls, a rational and a non-rational one.

The latter may be reminiscent of Numenius' theory of the soul, since he distinguishes two souls, rational and non-rational.<sup>51</sup> These are meant to be two kinds of soul, not two aspects of the soul that we have.<sup>52</sup> Origen's theory of soul is actually similar to that of Numenius. He also conceives of the human soul as essentially rational, claiming that the soul is a fallen intellect, which in its descent to bodies develops psychic faculties, one of which is reason, in order to animate the mortal body (Numenius fr. 34 Des Places; cf. Gen. 2:7). Origen's theory is also reminiscent of Plotinus' relevant theory. Both Origen and Plotinus maintain that it is the intellectual aspect of our soul that identifies with our real self and that remains always with us no matter what we do (*Enn.* IV.8.8).<sup>53</sup> Like Plotinus, Origen not only stresses the original intellectual nature of our soul but also that this remains unaltered regardless of the choices that we make, to the extent that the human soul as essentially rational assimilates us with God's intellectual nature and makes us participate equally to his wisdom and justice (*Princ.* I.3.6, with reference to Gen. 2:7).<sup>54</sup> In a critical turn against the Gnostics, Origen stresses that all humans have equally a share of the divine (*Princ.* I.3.6) and for that reason human souls never lose their ability to return to their original intellectual status.

From the above it becomes fairly clear, I think, that Origen's theory of the soul is determined to a large extent by ethical concerns, that is, by concerns about divine justice and human autonomy. Origen articulates a theory of the soul that allows him to maintain that wickedness is brought about by humans, not God. A similar concern plays a role in the shaping of the relevant theory in Justin and Irenaeus, but with Origen this becomes much more manifest. Origen understands the scriptural view that man is made in the image and likeness of God as suggesting that man is an intellect precisely as God is (*Princ.* II.10.7). For Origen, the fact that we are in a body and we have a soul that operates in the body is indicative of our failure to retain our original state of intellect, that is, it is evidence of our sin.

## Nemesius and Gregory of Nyssa

Origen's doctrine of the soul as a fallen intellect pre-existing its embodiment was resisted by later generations of Christian thinkers. They maintain instead that the intellect is one part of the soul, namely the part responsible for thinking functions. For Athanasius, for instance, the intellect is the part that commands or directs the soul (*C. Gentes* 31, 32), in the same way that the world is directed by the God (38, 39, 42, 47). This means that Athanasius takes the human soul to be essentially rational (*logikē*; 33.30, 34.2–3), agreeing in this respect with Clement and Origen. According to Athanasius, it is this essentially rational nature of the human soul that allows it to purify itself from passions and return to God, which is the way for humans to become like God (2.21–34, 34.11–19). As for Clement and Origen, human autonomy and the biblical remark of man's likeness to God entail that the human soul is essentially rational. The question, however, is how this essentially rational soul connects with the human body. Nemesius and Gregory of Nyssa, writing at the same time, set out to engage with this question in some detail.

Nemesius articulates an interesting alternative to Origen's theory of the soul in his only surviving work, *On the Nature of Man*. Nemesius' starting point is that humans consist of soul and body, with the intellect (*nous*) being part of the soul and, moreover, that the human soul is of an intellectual nature (*De nat. hom.* 1, 38 Morani). Hence Nemesius rejects both the materialist theories of Epicureans and Stoics and the theories of Plotinus and Apollinarius that distinguish sharply between soul and intellect. Nemesius also rejects both the view that the soul is a created entity, a view that, as has been seen, several Christians accepted including Eunomius, whom Nemesius openly criticized, and the view that the soul is transmitted from parents to children, a view (often called traducianism) associated with Tertullian (2, 30f.). Nemesius, rather, subscribes himself to the Platonic view of the soul as an intelligible entity that exists before its embodiment and, when embodied, it uses the body as its instrument (2, 30f.), and he also defends the immortality of the soul (2, 37f.). Nemesius actually sets out to demonstrate the immortality of the soul, because he takes it to be a crucial Christian doctrine, and he quite noticeably adduces Plato's arguments in the *Phaedo* to that effect. He also endorses the transmigration of the soul, which earlier Christians such as Theophilus and Tertullian rejected as a false Platonic doctrine; Nemesius claims, though, that transmigration is possible only within the same species (2, 34.6).

One difficult question for Platonists accepting the ontological difference between soul and body has been that of how the two entities relate to each other and interact. Plotinus and Porphyry have addressed this issue in many of their writings. Nemesius clearly draws on them, especially on Porphyry but also on Galen, in maintaining that the soul is not locally present in the body but develops a certain relation (*schesis*) to it.<sup>55</sup> However, the question remains as to how the soul connects with the body. Nemesius argues for an unmixed unity between soul and body (3.127–130; cf. Porphyry, *Sent.* 33) and further maintains that the soul permeates the body by developing a series of faculties (*dynameis*), which enable it to administer the body, an Aristotelian view that Platonists such as Plutarch, Severus, and Porphyry also accepted (3, 135–136; see p. 168 and n.7). Nemesius, however, is also strongly influenced by Galen and follows him in holding that the soul comprises a rational and a non-rational part (15, 17–21) and he, like Galen, locates the ability of the rational part in the brain (27).<sup>56</sup> This means that all operations of reason, such as perception, memory, rational desire, and the ability to make choices (*prohairesis*; ch. 27), are administered by the brain. This is an interesting and elaborate theory of how the soul engages with the body but leaves much that is wanting.

It is Nemesius' contemporary, Gregory of Nyssa, though, who offers the most sophisticated theory of the soul of that time. Gregory addresses the question of the status and the function of the human soul mainly in two of his most important works, *On the Creation of Man* and *On the Soul and Resurrection*.<sup>57</sup> The two works make up a unity. The aim of the former is to show that human nature is specifically rational and it shapes human nature so as to become rational. The latter work follows up on that view and aims specifically to demonstrate that the soul survives the death of the body and reincarnates in a resurrected body. This work is a dialogue

between his sister Macrina and Gregory himself and its setting is strongly and intentionally reminiscent of Plato's *Phaedo*; Macrina, like Socrates, speaks in her deathbed of the afterlife of the soul.

In *On the Soul* Gregory starts by addressing the question of how the soul is connected with the body. Two options that Gregory initially considers are the materialist views of the Stoics and the Epicureans, who maintain either that the soul is an element of the composite soul-body (*De an.* 20B; GNO 7.12) or that the body encompasses (*periechein*) the soul and holds it together (*perikrateitai*; 21B; GNO 9.3, 14). Gregory describes both groups of philosophers as taking the view that the soul is of a nature similar to that of the body (*homophyēs*; 24A; GNO 10.7). For the Stoics, this was actually the only way in which the soul and the body can mix with each other.<sup>58</sup> Macrina sets out to contradict these views and articulate an alternative one. She argues that the soul exists in the human body in the same sense in which God exists in the world. God, she claims, is present in the world by arranging together (*synarmozeti*) the whole world through a power that goes through it and maintains everything (28A; GNO 12.21–13.5). She suggests that the case with the soul is similar. For, she argues, man is a small world (*mikros kosmos*) that contains all the elements and each part complements the others in making up a whole (28BC; GNO 13.10–14).

This is the way of explaining God's relation to the world that we find in ps-Aristotle's *De mundo*. The author of *De mundo* argues that God governs the world and exercises his providence over it by being present in it through a *dynamis* that derives from him (398b7–11) and he seeks to illustrate that through a series of analogies.<sup>59</sup> The question is how this analogy applies to the soul–body relation in Gregory's *On the Soul*. What kind of principle is the soul that governs the body through a *dynamis* (29A)? The way Gregory talks about the soul suggests that the soul is a *dynamis*. And one question is what kind of *dynamis* it is. Another question also arises from the above. Gregory speaks interchangeably of soul and intellect and we justifiably wonder about their relation to each other and to the body.<sup>60</sup>

Macrina gives a definition of the soul that answers the first question but it also sheds light on the second one, too:

The soul is a created substance, living, intellectual, which through itself provides a faculty of life and a faculty of cognition of perceptible things in a body equipped with organs and potentially perceiving as long as the nature that can receive these faculties subsists.

(*De an.* 29B; GNO 15.6–9)<sup>61</sup>

In the above definition Gregory presents soul as an intellectual substance (*noera ousia*), which as such enlivens the human body. The soul thus defined enables both life and cognition. But the pressing question here is how the soul can be both a *dynamis* (power) and a substance. Let us look at the evidence more carefully. In his *On the Creation of Man* Gregory makes himself clearer arguing that the soul is an intellect (*nous*; *De hom. opif.* 176BD) that holds human nature together and unifies it (*synechei*; 164AB). As I said in Chapter 3 (pp. 124–125), Gregory argues that

the human body is shaped by the intellect or the intellectual soul in the same sense that a musical instrument is shaped by music (149BC). The intellect accounts for the form (*eidos*) of the body, the absence of which results in formlessness (*amorphia*; 161D). The intellect, we are told, goes through the entire body, which is its instrument, and applies to each of its parts through activities that are proper to it (161B; cited in Chapter 3, pp. 123–124). This means that the intellect is not locally present in the body and yet shapes the body. Gregory actually criticizes all those who localize the soul in the body, such as those who claim, like Plato in the *Timaeus* (70a), that the rational part or kind of the soul is in the head, and also those such as Alexander of Aphrodisias, who held that the heart is the seat of the soul (*De hom. opif.* 156CD).<sup>62</sup> The intellect, Gregory argues, rather, permeates the whole body as a power (*dynamis*) and through its activities both enlivens and makes human nature become like intellect (164BC).

Apparently then Gregory identifies the soul with the intellect, which permeates the body as a power, and this is an intellectual substance (*noera ousia*). Gregory follows a long tradition, including Clement and Origen, in considering the soul to be an intellectual substance, self-active, ruling over the human body. Gregory also stresses that soul and body come about together; there is no pre-existence of the one or the other and no transmigration of the soul. It is debatable whether this is a point against Origen. As we have seen, for Origen too the soul does not exist before the body; yet the intellect which develops into soul does exist in an ethereal body before its embodiment in a mortal body.<sup>63</sup> Most probably Gregory directs his point against the view found in Platonic dialogues such as the *Phaedo*, the *Phaedrus*, or the *Republic*, according to which the soul existed in a disembodied state before its incarnation and that it migrates to animals. The following passage makes that clear:

For I heard from the partisans of such views, that there exist certain hosts of souls in a kind of special state, living there before their embodied life, and that they wander while whirling given their fine and flexible nature. These souls enter the bodies because of a certain tendency of theirs towards baseness shedding their feathers (*pterororryousas*). And first they enter human bodies and then, because of their association with the non-rational affections, they abandon the human life, since that which is fine and flexible, namely the soul, first has a propensity and a tendency to enter the human bodies because of wickedness, and then, when the rational power ceases, they move to non-rational animals. There they enjoy the gift of perception. From this stage again they return gradually to the heavenly space. This doctrine is proven to be without foundation even by those with limited powers of judgment.

(*De an.* 112C–113D, GNO 84.14–85.10)

Here Gregory rejects the view of the pre-existence of the soul and of the transmigration, and the term *pterororryousas* points the reader directly to the *Phaedrus* (246b). Gregory argues instead that the soul is an intellect that exists and operates

in a body with organs and sense faculties (*organikon kai aisthētikon*). This is not only to say that the soul finds itself in such a body, but also that it is able to function as a soul if there is such a body. A body of a certain kind is a necessary condition for the soul to be the kind of principle it is. This is because the soul operates by actualizing abilities or potentialities that the body has. This becomes clearer if we look at the way Gregory connects body and soul in *On the Creation of Man*. There he claims that the soul is already contained in the male sperm and there is no point in which the soul exists without body or the body without soul (*De hom. opif.* 253BD). Just as there is no way of separating form and matter in an artefact, so, he claims, there is no way of separating soul and body (253C). The fact, he argues, that embryos from the very start nourish themselves, move, and grow suggests that there is soul in them (*De an.* 125B–128B; GNO 95.3–96.17). In Gregory's view, soul and body do not lose their bond, even at death; they rather remain in some connection, which allows the soul to reconstitute the body (*De an.* 48B, 72C–76B; GNO 30.18–21, 52.7–54.25). The shaping of the body by the intellectual soul has, as a result, that it can reunite the elements of the body after their dissolution. In such a way the person maintains its identity even after the body's resurrection (as I will explain in the next section).<sup>64</sup>

Gregory seeks to elucidate the way the soul relates to the body elaborating on the artefact analogy mentioned above. The sculptor, Gregory says, starts carving a form on matter, but he does not impose that form all at once; rather, he gradually improves on it until he perfects it (*De hom. opif.* 253BC). What guides the perfection of the form is partly the form itself, which has already shaped the body partly and which exists in the sculptor's intellect. But the question remains: how does the soul shape the body and what is the role of the intellect in this? How does the soul both enliven and cognize?

Gregory's idea is that the intellectual soul (*noera*; 176BD), which he terms soul proper (*kyriōs psychē*) or true soul (*alēthēs psychē*), mixes with our material nature, that is, the body, through the senses.<sup>65</sup> As we saw in Chapter 3 (p. 189), Gregory holds that it is not the senses that perceive but rather the intellect that perceives through the senses (*De hom. opif.* 138D–140A; *De an.* 29D–32A; GNO 15.9–16.15), as Socrates suggests in the *Theaetetus* (184cd). If Gregory identifies the soul proper with the intellect, the question then is how exactly the intellect shapes the body. Even if we are prepared to accept that the intellect permeates the sense organs, it remains unclear how this is the case for the rest of the body.

Gregory, like Origen, does not hide his puzzlement on this matter, and like Origen he proceeds in a zetetic manner. He tells us that the soul–body relation is ineffable and incomprehensible (*De hom. opif.* 177BC), yet he suggests that the intellect shapes the body in two main ways.

First, the intellect shapes the body so that it can be used as an instrument of reason (*De hom. opif.* 148C). The human body has a certain posture, an upright one, and we have hands instead of another set of feet. Gregory claims that this arrangement of the human body is due to the shaping effect of reason (136B, 144AC), to the intellectual nature of our soul, and in this sense the entire human nature is similar to God (136C). This point was made already by Plato (*Timaeus* 90ab)

and Aristotle (*Parts of animals* 686a27–31),<sup>66</sup> who both saw a correlation between human posture and human cognitive abilities, and it may well be that Gregory draws on them. Of course, we are not rational from the beginning of our lives. Yet only a certain form of body would allow for that development as its perfection, namely a body informed by reason in an inchoate mode.

The second way in which the intellect shapes the body is by informing the senses. As has been seen, Gregory insists that the intellect perceives through the senses, that is, that the intellect sees and hears through the eyes and the ears (*De an.* 32A; GNO 16.15).<sup>67</sup> Gregory, I suggest, implies two things here. The first is that our senses operate by means of concepts. This is suggested when Macrina speaks of her physician, who tries to diagnose her illness. The physician, she says, cognizes an affection (*pathos*) of her organism by sensing the quality of her breathing (*De an.* 29D–32A; GNO 15.9–16.15). Macrina claims that this cognition would be impossible, unless there was a concept (*ennoia*) in the cognizing subject to lead the sense of touch to the conclusion it reaches about the matter under investigation. This means, Macrina further claims, that the sense organs do not cognize by themselves alone, but rather it is the intellect that cognizes through them, and the sense organs contribute by initiating the process of cognition. Macrina goes on to claim that this kind of cognition pertains not only to scientists such as physicians, but also to all humans. When we sense-perceive the sun, the moon, or a vessel floating in a lake, our perceptions, she suggests, are shaped by concepts (*epinoiai*) and responsible for this is the intellect (37B; GNO 22.12–14).

In this account, Gregory brings together two aspects of sense-perception that we need to distinguish. The first has to do with the way material affections become affections of soul, or, in our jargon, how material events become mental events. Gregory does not address specifically this question, but an answer is there for him, given his metaphysics. A material affection, such as hot, red, or heavy, is already a perceptible quality for Gregory. As we saw in Chapter 2 (pp. 85–87), Gregory maintains that matter does not exist; matter, rather, is an epiphenomenon of the combination of qualities or *logoi*. In his view, God created the world by instantiating his thoughts, the *logoi*, into the world, and in this sense God did not need matter and did not create anything different from himself. Since man is an intellect like God, he is able to capture the qualities that make up sensible entities and thus get to know them. The second aspect of sense-perception is that the human intellect that cognizes through the senses does so by bringing into sense-perception concepts that pertain to the perceived subject matter but are not sense-perceived. When we see the sun, for instance, we cognize a celestial body, which is fiery, bigger than it seems, and so on. All these features are beyond the actual sense data we perceive, yet we integrate them in our cognition.

If the intellect “mixes” with the bodily senses in these two ways, then this is no mixing at all. This, rather, is a way in which the intellect permeates the senses without being located in the senses. The intellect does this by translating the sense data in a conceptual form. This is no transformation of them, since they are already reasons (*logoi*), yet the human conceptualization adds to them elements that are not

present in sense-perception. It would be impossible that the human sense organs served the intellect in such a way unless the human body as a whole had not been shaped so as to be the body of a rational nature.<sup>68</sup> It is in this sense, I suggest, that the intellect shapes the body. The intellect does this without actually being present in, or mixing with, the body, since the intellect is incorporeal and as such non-extended (*adiastaton*; *De an.* 45C; GNO 29.5); yet it is present through its activities, which I outlined above, namely the arrangement of the human body and the informing of the human sense faculties. We find a similar view in Plotinus, Porphyry, and Nemesius.<sup>69</sup>

Since Gregory takes this view of the intellect–body relation, it makes sense for him to claim that the sentient (*aīsthētikē*) human nature is transformed by reason, and in the rational faculty all psychic faculties are included (*De hom. opif.* 148BC). When we speak of “reason” here, we should understand the effect of a principle of order and coherence, namely that of intellect, as is the case with reason imparted by the creator of the world to creation (*De an.* 24C; GNO 10.14–11.3). The fact that the intellect makes the entire human nature rational and thus similar to God (149B) is not in conflict with the view that there are non-rational parts of the soul, which Gregory also defends. This intellect is the guide of the soul (*On Virginité* 404D), the ruling principle, and the most divine element in us (*De an.* 89B; GNO 66.9–14), but this is not merely given. Gregory argues that we must let reason dominate over non-rational desires if we are to do justice to our rational nature (93C–96A; GNO 69.6–70.3).

The problem, however, is that Gregory also speaks of the soul as consisting of three parts: reason, spirit, and appetite. Gregory not only embraces this Platonic view of the soul but also adopts the relevant imagery; in several works he uses the picture of the charioteer in the *Phaedrus* (253c–254d) to illustrate the tripartite structure of the soul (*Vita Mosis* 361CD; *De an.* 49BC, 64D; *On Virginité* PG 44, 404D). In *On the Soul and Resurrection*, Gregory brings up this imagery to discuss the merits of the soul’s partition. His sister Macrina appears to reject this view. Following *Republic X* (611B–D), she argues that the spirited and the appetitive part of the soul do not belong to the essence of the soul but rather are external additions (*prosphykenai*; *De an.* 56C, cf. 53AB; GNO 38.14, 35.7–22).<sup>70</sup> Gregory, however, argues that the two non-rational parts play an important role in human life; emotions and desires can lead us to virtue, he claims, if they are guided by reason (57A; GNO 38.15–39.5).<sup>71</sup> For, he argues in accordance with *Republic IV*, the appetitive and the spirited part of the soul are driven by non-rational desire not by the good; only reason can desire the good (64D–65A; GNO 44.19–45.13). Later, Macrina revises her view and claims that the rational part of the soul should transcend and transform the other two parts (93B–97B; GNO 69.6–71.15). In his *On the Creation of Man*, though, Gregory speaks of three faculties, which he names nutritive, perceptive, and reasoning (*De hom. opif.* 176C), and also of a rational, perceptive, and natural kind of soul (148B). In the same context, Gregory speaks of three choices of life: the life of flesh; the life of soul; and the life of spirit, which is the perfect life (145D–148B). This implies a distinction of body, soul, and spirit like the one we found in Justin and Irenaeus. And the question is: how do these pictures fit together?



Apparently, Gregory is not consistent in his description of the non-rational part of the soul and he wavers between the soul's parts and the soul's faculties. This, however, must have been a relatively minor issue to him, because, as I have said above, the soul strictly speaking is an intellect that unifies the soul and shapes the human body. Yet Gregory is consistent in holding that the non-rational parts of the soul always exist in it and the soul forms a unity that never goes away. In his work *On Virginité*, Gregory argues on the one hand that Christians should abstain from bodily pleasures, yet on the other hand they also should not neglect their bodies or lead an excessively ascetic life. Gregory refers us to the right balance that doctors recommend and he goes on to illustrate that with an image inspired by the myth of the charioteer in the *Phaedrus*:<sup>72</sup>

If there is any truth in this doctrine [i.e. that of the balance of qualities], then we need to pay attention to the balance of qualities in order to remain in good health, and we should not favour either an excess or a defect in any part of these constituent elements by an irregularity of diet. For like the charioteer who drives a chariot with young horses that do not have the same pace does not urge the fast one with the whip and rein in the slow one, nor again does he let the horse that is vicious and unruly go his own way to the confusion or orderly driving, but he quickens the pace of the first, holds the second and reaches the third with his whip until he makes them move together in a straight way; similarly our intellect which holds the reins of the body will not devise ways of increasing the fever in the time of youth, when heat of youth is abundant, nor will increase the cooling and thinning when the body is already chilled by the affections or time . . . but it will curtail what is immoderate in either direction and will take care to avoid harming the body in the one or the other way.

(*On Virginité* 404B–405A)

According to the image of the charioteer that Gregory adopts, the human soul consists of three parts, which correspond to the charioteer and the two horses, one good and one bad: the good horse stands for spirit, the bad for appetite, while the charioteer stands for reason (*Phaedrus* 246a–250c). The difficulty that the charioteer experiences is not due to the conflicting desires of the horses or the conflict between the desires of the horses and himself, but rather due to the fact that the two horses are different, that is, they walk at a different pace, while the bad horse is also unruly. In the above passage, however, Gregory does not use the image of the charioteer in order to refer to the conflicts in the human soul, as in the *Phaedrus*, but to the difficulties that our intellect experiences in controlling aspects or sides of our nature, the heat of the youth and the cooling of the old age, and also our tendencies for too much or too little, that is, difficulties that have to do with our bodily nature. For Gregory the picture of the charioteer illustrates the unity of the soul despite its partition; the intellect, symbolized by the charioteer, has a dominant and controlling role over the non-rational parts and the body. Thus the

intellect unifies the soul, despite its strong desires stemming from its association with the body. It is this dominant role of the intellect over the non-rational parts of the soul and the body that is distinctive of the human nature, in Gregory's view, and it is in this respect that we resemble the divine. Gregory adds, though, that this very respect of our nature remains incomprehensible and evades our knowledge, precisely because it is divine (*De hom. opif.* 155C–156B).<sup>73</sup>

## The status of the human body

From the above it emerges that for Gregory the human body is not merely the source of irrational desires and affections, a burden of the soul; rather, it is shaped by reason and can be used as an instrument of reason. We have already seen this point made by Irenaeus and it is now stressed by Gregory. In this sense the body is part of human nature, that is, part of human identity, which is rational. As I have noted earlier, this is a point of difference between early Christian philosophers on the one hand and Platonists, but also Gnostics, on the other.<sup>74</sup> In the wake of Plato's remarks about the hindrances the body puts in the soul (e.g. *Phaedo* 66b), Platonists used to underestimate the role of the body in the human constitution, despite the considerable elevation of the body in the later Platonic work (*Tim.* 42e–47e). Quite telling of the Platonist attitude is that Plotinus was reportedly ashamed of being in a body (Porphyry, *VP.* 1). Plotinus defends the view that our intellectual soul, our true self, remains in the intelligible world and does not mix with the body (*Enn.* IV.8.8.1–3), and he supports that view with reference to his own personal experience of living as if he were out of the body (*Enn.* IV.8.1.1–10).

Still, Plotinus values the human body more than contemporary Gnostics and he criticizes the Gnostic view on the body in *Ennead* II.9. Against the Valentinian Gnostics, who despised the body and classified those attached to the body as earthly and denied them salvation, Plotinus argues that the human body, like the body of the world, conforms to an intelligible pattern (*eidōs*; *Enn.* II.9.17). This pattern is the soul, which is the principle that bestows order and beauty on the body (*Enn.* II.9.17.15–21). The Gnostics do well, Plotinus continues, to despise the beautiful appearance of male and female bodies, which can lead to wickedness, but that does not mean that they should also despise beauty, because by doing so they show lack of appreciation for the intelligible source of it (*Enn.* II.9.17.27–32, 50–55). This is why, Plotinus concludes, we need to value our body, since it is built by a skilful principle, the world-soul (*Enn.* II.9.18), but, on the other hand, he claims, we also need to remain pure and without affection for the body (*philosōmatein*; *Enn.* II.9.18.41–42).<sup>75</sup>

Christian thinkers move along similar lines. In his *De opificio Dei*, Lactantius argues strongly that the human body testifies to God's providence, as does everything else in the world. Like Gregory, Lactantius claims that this becomes evident in the human upright posture (*De opif. Dei.* 4.22, 5, 8.1; cf. Basil, *Hex.* 9), and also, more generally, in the entire structure of humans, the organs of the head (*De opif. Dei* 10) and the internal organs (11). This point had already been made by Galen

in his *On the Usefulness of Parts*. Galen argues there that the construction of the human body testifies to the existence of divine providence.<sup>76</sup> And he maintains that the function of the parts of the human body cannot but teach us piety. One case in point is the human visual mechanism; we have two eyes but we do not see double, Galen observes (*On the Usefulness of Parts*, vol. IV Kühn, ch. 10.14).<sup>77</sup> Galen indeed praises the wisdom and goodness of the demiurge and characterizes his treatise a “sacred account” (*hieros logos*; *On the Usefulness of Parts*, vol. IV Kühn, 365.13–366.10). This line of thought recurs in Gregory of Nyssa’s *On the Creation of Man*, which may well have drawn on Galen in this regard.

Gregory suggests that God has deliberated about how to create human beings (*De hom. opif.* 133C). Human nature is created in such a way that the shape of the body accords with the essentially rational character of the soul (137A–C) and this character pervades all sense organs and the entire body and renders the entire human nature rational and, in this sense, similar to God (140A). According to Gregory, human corporeality is not a fruit of the fall of the soul or of sin, as is suggested in Plato’s *Phaedrus* and as Origen claimed (*De an.* 112C–113C; GNO 84.8–85.19). According to Gregory, such a view is deficient because it also implies that the soul is an entity that is subject to change (116A; GNO 86.13–17). The other problem with this view is that it postulates the existence of wickedness in the intelligible realm already as an element inherent in the constitution of beings (116C; GNO 87.14–16), but this is at odds with the idea that God, who is essentially good, is the source of all beings (117C; GNO 89.12–14). Gregory, rather, suggests that the human being was willed by God in all his complexity as a being in which the intelligible and the sensible world come together harmoniously. It is in this sense that the Christian idea of the resurrection of the body can be defended, according to Gregory.

As I said earlier (pp. 39, 85), this Christian doctrine was severely criticized by pagan critics such as Celsus and Porphyry.<sup>78</sup> This is not surprising. For, according to the Platonist point of view, the body is the source of non-rational desires and passions and the only way to discover our true selves is to escape from the body.<sup>79</sup> This liberation from the body comes in stages, which involve the minimization of bodily desires and affections, since these make the soul live as if it were “drunk” (*Phaed.* 79cd). From this point of view, the idea of the resurrection of the body is appalling to Platonists and nonsensical to Hellenic philosophers in general. As we are told in Acts 17.32–33, the philosophers among Paul’s audience in Athens started laughing at him. Plotinus actually makes a statement that looks like a criticism of the Christian idea: “The true waking is a true getting up from the body, not with the body (*ou meta sōmatos anastasis*), because getting up with the body would only mean getting out (*metastasis*) of one sleep into another” (*Enn.* III.6.6.72–77).

Early Christians such as Athenagoras and Tertullian set out to defend the resurrection of the body, arguing that nothing is impossible to the divine will.<sup>80</sup> This argument, however, is not convincing. Aristotle had long ago argued in *De caelo* that God cannot change the natural character of things. Gregory defends the resurrection of the human body in a different and much more sophisticated way.

Gregory builds his argument in favour of the resurrection on ontological grounds.<sup>81</sup> He argues that the resurrection is possible because the human body, like all bodies, is made up of qualities, which constitute the corporeal nature (*De an.* 45AC; GNO 28.22–29.17). Shape, colour, size, and weight are such qualities, which in their combination constitute a body. As we saw in Chapter 2, each of these qualities is nothing but a *logos* of God for Gregory (124CD; GNO 94.7–15; see Chapter 2, pp. 84–87). It is the combination of these *logoi* that brings sensible entities about, which, however, can also be dissolved. Gregory actually discusses examples of dissolutions of bodies that result in the emergence of their constituent qualities (73B–76B; GNO 53.4–54.15). He claims that, if the *logoi* can be combined and also dissolved, they can also be recombined, that is, restored (124CD).

The problem, however, is what kind of body the resurrected one will be. Does this mean that each will have his previous body restored: elderly, ill, or mutilated? Gregory claims that the resurrected bodies will not be the ones that died (140C; GNO 107.6–10), a view that Tertullian defended (*De an.* 56.5–6). But the question, then, is in what sense the resurrected body will be our body (*De an.* 56.5–6). Gregory addresses that question and argues that the resurrected body will be purified from the non-rational life (*alogos zōē*), which mixes with the human nature in the course of life (148BC; GNO 112.18–113.19). This body will be more refined and more ethereal (108A; GNO 79.12–17), but it will still be essentially our own body. Its refinement will consist in the removal of wickedness. In this sense the resurrection is a restoration of our nature in its original state, that is, the state before the occurrence of badness.<sup>82</sup>

Gregory turns out to defend a view similar to that of Origen on the issue of restoration of human nature in its original state, although his starting point is a substantially different position on the nature of the human soul. However, one final problem remains. What is the state of the individual between death and the resurrection of the body?

Gregory has an answer to that, too.<sup>83</sup> He claims that the soul does not completely dissociate from the body at death; rather, the soul “remains attached to its element until their reconstitution at the resurrection” (*De an.* 76AB; cf. 77B; GNO 54.16–25, 56.3–6). This means that the soul remains connected with each element and, what is more, the soul determines a unique combination of elements that distinguish one soul from the other and also the corresponding individual bodily constitution. Gregory, then, proposes an ingenious solution to the problem of the gap between death and resurrection – namely, that there is no gap since the soul remains attached to its own particular physical elements between death and resurrection and this attachment accounts for a continued existence of the individual. Personal identity pro- or post-mortem is determined by the soul but only insofar as it is the soul which informs the elements of the body as well as their arrangement.

## Conclusion

The debate about the nature of the soul and its relation to body among Christians shows well how many diverse positions were circulated and how philosophically

sophisticated these were. It also shows how profoundly they set themselves in dialogue with pagan philosophical views and alternative Christian ones, such as those of the Gnostics. The positions of Origen and Gregory in particular also show that they are not only capable of articulating highly sophisticated philosophical views on the nature of the soul and its connection of the body and also formulating eloquent objections to rival views, but that they are also capable of developing the kind of views that fit in a certain philosophical system, in which they address all major philosophical questions in a coherent manner. The psychological theories of Origen and Gregory of Nyssa make part of their overall philosophical position, which involves their stance on cosmology, human free will, the issue of theodicy, and that of the resurrection of the body. This feature is indicative of the Christian ingenuity and philosophical ability.

## Notes

- 1 For an overview of the ancient theories of soul, see Lorenz (2009) and Karamanolis and Zanella (2020).
- 2 For a good account of Aristotle's theory of the soul, see Caston (2006).
- 3 See the collection of texts that illustrate the Stoic and Epicurean views on the soul by LS, sections 14 and 53.
- 4 Plato also speaks similarly, however, in *Rep.* 435bc, 441c.
- 5 In the *Philebus* and the *Sophist*, soul and intellect are distinguished and the latter is said to be dependent on the former. *Philebus* 30c, *Soph.* 248d–249a; Cf. *Tim.* 30b, 46de. See Carone (2005b).
- 6 See Aristotle, *De an.* III.4; Sextus, *A.M.* VII.234 (=LS 53F); Aetius IV.21.1–4 (=LS 53H).
- 7 See Plutarch, *De virt. mor.* 442BC; *De def. orac.* 429EF; Severus in Eusebius, *P.E.* XIII.17.6; Plotinus, *Enn.* IV.3.23.3–22; Porphyry, *On the faculties of the soul*, fr. 253 Smith. See Karamanolis (2006: 112–113, 300–302).
- 8 See Strato frs. 123–124 Wehrli, targeting *Phaedo's* final argument (105b–107a) and Boethius, in Simplicius, *In de anima* 247.23–26. See further Gottschalk (1987).
- 9 Porphyry, *To Gaurus on How Embryos are Ensouled*. See the translation with introduction and comments by Wilberding (2011).
- 10 On Plotinus' conception of the soul, see Gerson (1994: 127–155); more recently, Noble (2013), Caluori (2015).
- 11 This is why Plotinus argues that only a shadow of the soul is present in the human body (cf. *Enn.* I.6.8, IV.4.18). On this, see further Caluori (2015: 180–192).
- 12 On this question, see Congourdeau (2007).
- 13 A similar *aporia* about the nature of the soul is expressed later by Augustine, *De libero arbitrio* III.188–199.
- 14 Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης ἀγιάσαι ὑμᾶς ὀλοτελεῖς, καὶ ὀλόκληρον ὑμῶν τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα ἀμέμπτως ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τηρηθεῖη (1 Thess. 5:23).
- 15 Cf. Plato, *Phaed.* 105c–d and Aristotle, *De an.* 415b8–14, who claims that “the soul is the cause (*aitia*) and principle (*archē*) of the living body. For the cause of being in all things is substance (*ousia*) and in living beings it is life that is being, and the cause and principle of it is the soul.”
- 16 Spanneut (1957: 136–138) disputes that Justin endorses a tripartite view of man. Justin's commitment to the tripartite nature of man is defended and elaborated by Osborn (1973: 139–153).
- 17 See also Chapter 4, pp. 142–144.

- 18 On Justin's notion of *Logos*, see Chapter 1, pp. 34–36.
- 19 See Karamanolis (2013b: section on psychology).
- 20 Καθ' ἑαυτὴν γὰρ σκότος ἐστίν, καὶ οὐδὲν ἐν αὐτῇ φωτεινόν (*Or.* 13.2).
- 21 Plutarch, *De sera* 566A also argues that the soul tends to become quasi corporeal when not informed by the intellect.
- 22 On Irenaeus' psychology, see Osborn (1981: 81–84; 2001: 219–227), Jacobsen (2006), Wyrwa (1988), and Cartwright (2018: 174–179). For a comprehensive account, see Orbe (1969).
- 23 On Numenius' psychology, see Frede (1987a: 1069–1072) and Karamanolis (2013a).
- 24 For a discussion of this issue, see Karamanolis (2007).
- 25 *A Deo aspiratio vitae unita plasmati animavit hominem et anima rationabile ostendit* (*Adv. Haer.* V.1.3). The verb *plasmare* and the noun *plasmatio* pick up the biblical πλάσσειν, πλάσις (*Gen.* 2:7).
- 26 Irenaeus' attitude to body has been studied in detail by Orbe (1969: 32–89).
- 27 The date of its composition is estimated between 207 and 213 and most probably around 210–211. The edition with commentary of Waszink (1947) remains indispensable. There is an important new edition with translation and notes in French in the SC series by Leal and Mattei (2019).
- 28 See Waszink (1947: 7–14) and Leal and Mattei (2019: 12–14). Probably Tertullian targets a work of Hermogenes on the soul no longer extant today. For a discussion of Tertullian's psychology, see Osborn (1997: 164–167, 214–215), Kitzler (2009), and Barnes (2009). *Apol.* 48.4 is not showing as clearly, as Osborn thinks that Tertullian conceives the soul as an intelligible entity. Quite the opposite is actually the case.
- 29 I owe the reconstruction of Hermogenes' argument to Waszink (1947: 9; 1955).
- 30 The Stoic view of soul as *pneuma* is attested already in the founder of the Stoa, Zeno, *SVF* I.146, I.519, II.783, 785, 826, and LS section 53. See further Hankinson (2003: 295–301).
- 31 Karpp (1934: 38–41) goes as far as to claim that Tertullian's treatise is an elaborated version of Soranus' work *On the Soul*. I find this unlikely given how different Tertullian's aim and perspective is; for instance, the last part of *De anima* discusses eschatology (54–58). More plausible is Polito's view (1994) that Tertullian draws on Soranus and adjusts this material to his objectives. The fragments of Soranus are collected by Podolak (2010).
- 32 Thus Waszink (1947: 182). See also Podolak (2010: 69–71). On the sources of *De anima*, see Leal and Mattei (2019: 67–93).
- 33 On Tertullian's sympathy with Stoicism, see Moerschini (1979).
- 34 On this point, see Waszink (1947: 200–201).
- 35 *Omne quod est, corpus est sui generis . . . Nihil est incorporeale nisi quod non est* (*De carne Christi* 11.4).
- 36 *Ex eo igitur fetus in utero homo, a quo forma completa est* (*De an.* 37.2).
- 37 We need to remember, of course, that the *Hippocratic Oath* condemns abortion, but does not call it murder. Aristotle on the other hand condemns abortion from the time that the embryo has sensation and life (αἰσθησις καὶ ζωή; *Politics* 1335b22–26). But for Aristotle animal life presupposes sensation (*Generation of animals* 778b32–34; cf. 732a12–13). Quite importantly, Aristotle distinguishes between foetus (κύημα, *Generation of animals* 728b34), which is ensouled, and embryo, which has sensation and thus life in this sense. The mixture of male seed and female menstrual fluid makes up the former, but it takes some time for the formation of the latter. On the ancient views on abortion and the embryo, see Fontanille (1977) and Congourdeau (2007).
- 38 This changed with the emperors Severus and Caracalla c. 211, who introduced the ban of abortion as a crime against the parents, but not as a homicide. See further Riddle (1992).
- 39 Heraclides is attested to have argued that the soul is light-like and ethereal. The evidence is collected by Wehrli (1944–1959: vol. 7, 1955). For a discussion, see Gottschalk (1980).

- 40 *Audenter eternam mortem non ex nature securam hominem, sed ex culpa, ne ipsa quidem naturali* (*De an.* 52.2).
- 41 See above n. 37 and further Pouderon (2008).
- 42 See Origen, *Commentary on John* 6.85. Pamphilus, *Apology for Origen* 8 points this out as well.
- 43 Cf. *Commentary on John* 2.182, *Commentary on the Song* 2.5.21–28. I owe the references to Ramelli (2018c: 245).
- 44 *Psychesthai*; Plato, *Crat.* 399d–e; Aristotle, *De an.* 405b; Tertullian, *De an.* 25, 27.
- 45 Evagrius (e.g. *Gnostic Chapters* 3.28) takes over Origen's theory and he also speaks of the human souls as fallen intellects because of their negligence and abandoning of the contemplation of God, and as a result they distanced themselves from God.
- 46 On Origen's theory of *apokatastasis* (restoration), see now the detailed and thorough account of Ramelli (2013: 137–221). See also Chapter 6, p. 213.
- 47 Edwards (2002: 87–122), Ramelli (2018c). In the first edition I also subscribed to this view, which I now qualify.
- 48 I rely here on Ramelli (2018c).
- 49 *C. Cels.* I.32–33, *Commentary on John* 2.181–182 and the discussion in Ramelli (2018c: 259–260).
- 50 This is how Evagrius speaks in his *Letter to Melania* 6.
- 51 Thus Görgemanns and Karpp (1992: 603, n. 3). The theory of two (human) souls was maintained by some Gnostics (Clement, *Strom.* II.20.113).
- 52 See Karamanolis (2013a).
- 53 On Plotinus' view on the human self, see Remes (2007).
- 54 *quae participatio dei patris pervenit in omnes tam iustos quam peccatores et rationabiles atque irrationabiles et in omnia omnino quae sunt.* (*Princ.* I.3.6).
- 55 *De nat. hom.* 3, 38–41 M, citing Porphyry *Symmikta Zetemata* 3 (45–47 Dörrie). Cf. Porphyry, *On the Faculties of the Soul* fr. 253, *Sent.* 3, 4.
- 56 See Sharples and Van der Eijk (2008: 158–161).
- 57 For a discussion of Gregory's psychology, see Cherniss (1930: 12–25); Apostolopoulos (1986); Cavarnos (1976); Peroli (1997: 117–139); Zachhuber (1999, 2018); Corrigan (2009); Ramelli (2018a, 2018b).
- 58 This was one of the Stoic arguments in favour of the corporeal nature of the soul (*SVF* II.792–794).
- 59 Compare θεία δύναμις ἔντεχνός τε καὶ σοφὴ τοῖς οὖσιν ἐμφαινομένη καὶ διὰ πάντων ἤκουσα τὰ μέρη συναρμόζει τῷ ὅλῳ καὶ τὸ ὅλον συμπληροῖ ἐν τοῖς μέρεσι καὶ μίαν τινὴν περικρατεῖται δυνάμει τὸ πᾶν (a divine power skilful and wise that occurs in beings and goes through everything fits together the parts to the whole and fills the whole with the parts and everything is held together by one power. *De an.* 28A; GNO 12.21–13.2) and σεμνότερον δὲ καὶ πρεπωδέστερον αὐτὸν μὲν ἐπὶ τῆς ἀνωτάτω χώρας ἰδρῦσθαι, τὴν δὲ δύναμιν διὰ τοῦ σύμπαντος κόσμου διήκουσαν ἡλιὸν τε κινεῖν καὶ σελήνην καὶ τὸν πάντα οὐρανὸν περιάγειν αἰτίον τε γίνεσθαι τοῖς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς σωτηρίας (It is more noble, more becoming, for him [i.e. God] to reside in the highest place, while his power, penetrating the whole of the cosmos, moves the sun and moon and turns the whole of the heavens and is the cause of preservation for the things upon the earth. *De mundo* 398b7–11, trans. Furley). For an extensive discussion of the way in which God administers the world through a *dynamis* and the analogies involved, see Betegh and Gregoric (2020).
- 60 Zachhuber (2018) sets out to explain in which sense the soul is a *dynamis*.
- 61 ψυχὴ ἐστὶν οὐσία γεννητὴ, οὐσία ζῶσα, νοερά, σώματι ὀργανικῶ καὶ αἰσθητικῶ, δύναμιν ζωτικὴν καὶ τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἀντιληπτικὴν δι' ἑαυτῆς ἐνειῖσα, ἕως ἄν ἡ δεκτικὴ τούτων συνέστηκε φύσις. I retain the reading ἐνειῖσα (also preferred by Spira) instead of ἐνοῦσα that is preferred in the *Patrologia Graeca* but does not have manuscript support. I am indebted to Ilaria Ramelli, who has drawn my attention to that and also for the correction of the last part of my translation in her (2018a: 298). Ramelli (2018a; 2018b: 124–126) discusses further this definition of the soul.

- 62 Alexander, *De anima* 94.7–95.25, 98.24–99.25. The view of the Stoics was similar (*SVF* II.826).
- 63 Ramelli (2018a: 285–287) argues that Gregory does not distance from Origen in this regard, but at least Origen speaks of intellects pre-existing their embodiment in mortal bodies, while Gregory does not.
- 64 On this, see Morphew (2021, forthcoming) and the discussion in the next section.
- 65 Ἄλλ' ἡ μὲν ἀληθής τε καὶ τελεία ψυχή, μία τῇ φύσει ἐστίν, ἢ νοερά τε καὶ ἄυλος, ἡ διὰ τῶν αἰσθήσεων τῇ ὑλικῇ καταμιγνυμένη φύσει (But the true and perfect soul is one in nature, namely the intellectual and immaterial, the one that mixes with the material nature through the senses; *De hom. opif.* 176B).
- 66 See Gregoric (2005). Corrigan (2009: 146) points out Gregory's similarities also with Plotinus (*Enn.* VI.8.13–14) and Porphyry (*Sent.* 32).
- 67 Similarly, Athanasius, *C. Gentes* 31.16–23, who also takes the intellect (*nous*) to be the judge (*krites*) of the sense-perception: ἃ δεῖ ὄρᾶν καὶ ἀκοῦειν . . . οὐκέτι τῶν αἰσθήσεων ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ ταύτης νοῦ διακρίναι (what is to see and to hear . . . is not proper to the senses, but it is the job of the soul and of the intellect that is in it to distinguish).
- 68 On this issue, see further Cavarnos (1976: 67–69).
- 69 See Plotinus, *Enn.* III.9.4.1–9; Porphyry, *Sent.* 4, 5, 11, 31; Nemesius, *De nat. hom.* 124.4–144.9 Matthaeci.
- 70 Ἄ μέρη μὲν αὐτῆς εἶναι διὰ τὸ προσπεφυκέναι νομίζεται, οὐ μὴν ἐκεῖνο εἰσιν ὅπερ ἐστίν ἡ ψυχή κατ' οὐσίαν (*De an.* 56C; GNO 38.12–14). Cf. *Vita Mosis* 191. The term προσπεφυκέναι is used in *Republic* 611B. Cf. Numenius fr. 34 Des Places, Plotinus, *Enn.* VI.5.12.
- 71 The view of Basil, *Examine Yourself (In Attende tibi ipsi)* 213C, is similar; see further Knuutila (2004: 127–132).
- 72 Here I draw on Karamanolis (2020), to which I refer the reader for further discussion on the reception of the imagery of the charioteer by the early Christians.
- 73 I am grateful to Johannes Steenbuch for drawing my attention to this point.
- 74 There is an enormous literature on the early Christian views on the human body. See Brown (1988).
- 75 ἔξεστιν οὖν καὶ μὴ φιλοσωματεῖν καὶ καθαροῖς γίνεσθαι καὶ τοῦ θανάτου καταφρονεῖν (it is possible to us not to love our bodies and to become pure and despise death; *Enn.* II.9.18.41–42).
- 76 See Frede (2003: 102–108).
- 77 See the comments in Frede (2003: 98).
- 78 Ποῖον γὰρ σῶμα πάντη διαφθαρέν οἷόν τε ἐπανελθεῖν εἰς τὴν ἐξ ἀρχῆς φύσιν καὶ αὐτὴν ἐκείνην, ἐξ ἧς ἐλύθη, τὴν πρώτην σύστασιν; Οὐδὲν ἔχοντες ἀποκρίνασθαι καταφεύγουσιν εἰς ἀτοπωτάτην ἀναχώρησιν, ὅτι πᾶν δυνατὸν τῷ θεῷ (For which body that is completely destroyed is able to return to the initial nature and indeed to the first constitution, from which it was dissolved? Having nothing to reply to this they resort to an impossible retreat, that everything is possible to God); Celsus in Origen, *C. Cels.* V.14); cf. Porphyry *Against the Christians* fr. 35 Harnack.
- 79 See *Phaed.* 64c, 79cd, 81cd; *Phaedrus* 246a–248e.
- 80 Justin, 1 *Apol.* 19.4–5; Tatian, *Or.* 6; Athenagoras, *On Resurrection* 3; Tertullian, *Apol.* 48.5–6, *Res.* 11. This is also reflected in Celsus' claim cited above in n. 78. Christians adopted the concept of resurrection of the body from Judaism. We find it most prominently in the late book of Daniel. See Segal (1986: 60–77).
- 81 On Gregory's defence of the resurrection of the body, see Peroli (1997) and especially Morphew (2021, forthcoming).
- 82 ἀνάστασις ἐστίν ἡ εἰς τὸ ἀρχαῖον τῆς φύσεως ἡμῶν ἀποκατάστασις . . . ἀλλὰ θεῖον τι χρῆμα ἦν ἡ ἀνθρώπινη φύσις πρὶν ἐν ὀρμῇ γενέσθαι τοῦ κακοῦ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον (resurrection is the restoration of our nature to its ancient status . . . but human nature was a divine entity before the human aspect rushed to badness; *De an.* 148A; GNO 112.18–113.5).
- 83 See the detailed account of Morphew (2021, forthcoming).



# 6

## ETHICS AND POLITICS

### Introduction: the importance of ethics in Christianity

Ethics was crucial to early Christian philosophers and a considerable part of their work is dedicated to it. This is hardly surprising, given the strong focus on ethics in Scripture. In the New Testament in particular God's justice (*dikaïosynē*) is repeatedly emphasized and becomes a central theme in Paul's Letter to the Romans.<sup>1</sup> Paul argues that God's justice is a model for us and that it suggests to us a certain way of living. Paul sets out to outline this way of life and lists a number of ethical precepts. We find one important ethical precept in Jesus' teaching, namely the precept found in Jesus' sermon on the plain (Luke 6:13) and the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:12) known as the Golden Rule: "as you wish that men may do to you, do you also to them in like manner" (Luke 6:13).<sup>2</sup> This precept was recognized as a standard ethical norm by early Christians, yet its interpretation and application varied considerably, as we will see.

The other important ethical theme in the New Testament is the theme of the love of God for mankind and the love one should have for God and one's fellow human beings. In a way this theme replaces the role played by friendship (*philia*) in the ethics of the pagan philosophical schools. Friendship, in the wide sense that it had in antiquity, refers to a large network of relationships within and outside the family. In the New Testament, however, the idea is that God's love for mankind shows us the way to love our neighbour, and this love entails forgiveness and care for others (Rom. 5:6–8, 7:7; 1 Cor. 13; 2 Cor. 7:2; John 13:1). These two themes, God's justice and God's love for human beings, permeate the New Testament and profoundly shape its ethics.<sup>3</sup> The statement in Genesis (1:26) that man is created in the image and likeness of God was crucial for the view of early Christians that God is the model for human beings to imitate, which practically means that we also need to be just and loving to our fellow humans.

Early Christian philosophers took up this strong preoccupation of Scripture with ethics. They did so because ethics is so central to Scripture that it shapes the entire Christian doctrine. Yet ethics in Scripture is not philosophical ethics, that is, it lacks philosophical argument and consolidation. Early Christians set out to bridge this gap, to provide philosophical underpinnings to scriptural ethics. The centrality of ethics in Scripture and in contemporary philosophy supports the early Christian claim that Christianity is a philosophy, in that both Christianity and pagan philosophy have as an aim to lead us to a happy life, a life that does justice to human nature.

As we have seen in Chapter 1 (pp. 41–43), Christians argued that ethics is the aim of philosophy and especially of true philosophy, Christianity. Justin, for instance, claims that “philosophy is the science of being and knowledge of truth, and the reward of this science and this wisdom is happiness” (*Dial.* 3.5). Clement defines philosophy as “improvement of our soul” (*psychēs velitiotikē*; *Strom.* VII.1.2.3.1) and Origen similarly defines philosophy as “knowledge of beings that tells us how we should live” (*C. Cels.* III.12–13). Origen apparently tried to live according to this ideal, as reported by Gregory Thaumaturgos. Gregory says that what convinced him to study philosophy at Origen’s school was that there one learned how to transform philosophical teaching into a concrete way of life, that is, a life without passions (*Oratio Panegyrica* 9.123).<sup>4</sup> Lactantius takes a similar point of view; he criticizes philosophy, that is, Hellenic philosophy, on the grounds that philosophy presents itself as nothing other than the right way of living and the science of how to live well (*Div. Inst.* III.15). Yet, he claimed, philosophy does not fulfil this promise because, among other things, it is greatly preoccupied with useless knowledge that does not contribute to happiness in the least, such as logic; in this sense the knowledge that philosophy gives us is vain and unprofitable (III.13; see Chapter 3, p. 116). Lactantius concludes that only Christianity can provide the knowledge that leads to happiness.

Lactantius’ view is reminiscent of that of the Epicureans, who similarly neglected logic.<sup>5</sup> More generally, however, the statements of Christian philosophers cited above show that they, like the Hellenistic philosophers, did not draw a distinction between the theoretical and practical sides of philosophy but rather regarded the two as a unity with a common end: the attainment of happiness. In this sense they conceived of philosophy as a discipline with practical aims. This means two things: first, that the aim of philosophy is practical, to help us lead a prosperous life; and second, that the only, or the main, justification for doing philosophy is practical. This means that philosophy may also involve acquiring knowledge of a non-practical character, but this knowledge is sought on the assumption that it would enable the attainment of a happy life. On this view, philosophy is an art which, like any other, involves knowledge of different matters, but the final aim of philosophy is to produce something good: happy lives. In this sense philosophy is an art of living.<sup>6</sup>

This conception of philosophy is characteristic of Hellenistic philosophers and later ancient philosophers. A pivotal figure in the transition from Hellenistic philosophy to that of late antiquity was Antiochus of Ascalon, who reportedly

maintained that the value of philosophy lies precisely in helping us achieve a good life and that a divergence on this point would amount to a substantial difference in philosophical orientation (Cicero, *Acad.* II.31).<sup>7</sup> The consolidation of that tendency takes place with Plutarch and, later, with Plotinus. Both of them spent a great deal of energy in trying to show that Plato's ethics is the only realistic way of attaining happiness.<sup>8</sup> It is for this reason that they criticized other philosophical schools, such as Epicureanism and Stoicism, for proposing ethical ideals they considered misguided.<sup>9</sup>

As I have already said in Chapter 1, the convergence of early Christian philosophers with their Hellenic counterparts on the view that ethics is the aim of philosophy shapes their way of doing philosophy. One important question for both Hellenistic and early Christian philosophers was what kind of knowledge, other than the practical, was required. Stoics and Epicureans agreed that physics bears strongly on ethics; for the Stoics the study of the world teaches us what the good is and what our role in it should be. Christian philosophers are also similar in this respect. As we have seen so far, the views Christians took on cosmogony, logic, the issue of free will, and the nature of the human soul and its relation to the body, were driven predominantly by ethical concerns. Christian philosophers defended the view that God alone had created the world for the sake of man and because of his love for man. As we have seen in Chapter 2, this view was central to the way they understood cosmogony, because it provided a teleological motive for God's creation, namely the dissemination of goodness in the world, especially among mankind. As we have seen in previous chapters, early Christians, like pagans, maintained that God's goodness and providence was also manifested in the construction of the human body.

A corollary of the view that God exercises his goodness and providence is that God cannot be responsible for any evil in the world. Evil has no ontological reality, but is a privation of the good resulting from sin. Christian philosophers argued that the fact that man sins does not mean that God is ultimately responsible for wickedness insofar as he is the creator of human nature. For, they further argued, man is equipped with the capacity to choose; no sense-impression or thought alone can make one do something unless he assents to this or that impression or thought and thus makes a choice. As we have seen in Chapter 4, Christian philosophers argued that humans have the capacity to choose because humans are rational beings, and it is human reason that ultimately handles sense-impressions and thoughts. Indeed, early Christian philosophers held that the human soul is shaped by reason, although there is disagreement among them as to how exactly this is to be understood. Despite their disagreements, however, Christian philosophers agreed that reason is not another feature of human nature but one that shapes our nature to be of a rational character. In this respect, they argued, we are similar to God, who is reason.

One might argue, however, that the fact that Christians conceived of ethics as the aim of philosophy does not necessarily mean that Christians share a conception of ethics similar to that of Hellenic philosophers. This similarity has in fact been

seriously challenged. In her seminal paper on modern ethics,<sup>10</sup> G. E. M. Anscombe argued that, unlike ancient philosophical ethics, Christian ethics is marked by an attachment to law, and in this sense, she claims, Christianity distorted ancient ethics. This is a claim to consider. This claim also raises the broader question regarding the extent to which early Christian ethics develops along the lines of contemporary Hellenic philosophy or diverges from it. This question becomes particularly relevant in view of numerous modern studies that point to the similarities between the ethics of Hellenic philosophy, especially of Stoicism, and early Christianity.<sup>11</sup> The authors of these studies take as a starting point remarks made by early Christian philosophers to the effect that Christian ethics is close in spirit to Stoic ethics.<sup>12</sup> The question, though, is whether this is a legitimate starting point and, if so, then to what extent.

### The Christian way to ethics

Let us first consider the Christian perspective on ethics. There is a general tendency in the way ethics is dealt with in late antiquity which we need to appreciate, because, as I shall argue, this tendency also shapes early Christian ethics. I believe that it is partly the lack of an appreciation of the special perspective of late ancient ethics that accounts for modern criticism of Christian ethics – when Anscombe (1958) talks of the ethics of ancient philosophy, she mainly refers to that of Plato and Aristotle. Late ancient ethics has some special features, however, which it shares with Christian ethics.

The first of these is a cosmic and metaphysical perspective. This emerges with some clarity first in Plato's *Republic* X and becomes more pronounced in Plato's later dialogues, especially in the *Timaeus*, the *Politicus*, and the *Laws*. The *Timaeus* initiates a strategy of discussing the question of how man should live based on the nature of the world.<sup>13</sup> This strategy presumably influenced the early Stoic view that the study of the world, that is, physics, amounts to the study of what the good and the orderly is. This point of view was adopted by later Platonists, who rely heavily on the *Timaeus* for the reconstruction of Plato's philosophy, that is, for Plato's doctrine. In the *Timaeus* we are told that the divine demiurge creates the immortal part of man's soul, the intellect, while the soul's mortal part, which comprises the spirit and the appetite, is created by the lower, younger gods, the assistants of the divine craftsman (41b–43a). It is further suggested that the immortal, intellectual soul is the most divine part of us, by means of which we understand the world and do philosophy (90ac). This picture of human nature has clear ethical implications: humans should do justice to their most divine part, the intellect, by living a life guided by it, and one task of such a life is to appreciate and imitate the goodness of the world, which is the result of the application of divine reason.

Later Platonists take this picture of the *Timaeus* as a starting point for their ethical considerations. They ask what kind of entity man is, which leads them to address the question of the nature of the human soul. Following the *Timaeus*,

Platonists tend to maintain that the human soul is essentially an intellect, which is a feature that humans have in common with the other intellectual beings of this world, such as the divine creator and the world-soul. This intellectual nature of humans is crucial for determining how the human final end, happiness, can be achieved. Since humans are essentially intellects, just as God is, they should live the life of an intellect, as God does. This is what Socrates famously commands in *Theaetetus* 176ab, where he claims that man should aim to assimilate to God (*homoïōsis theōi*). This is also suggested in the *Phaedo* (64b–65d, 82a–83b), in the *Republic* (500b–d, 613a), and in the *Timaeus* (90ad). The ideal of assimilation to God becomes dominant in the work of later Platonists, such as Plutarch, Alcinoüs, Plotinus, and Porphyry,<sup>14</sup> but we already find it in Philo, who, as we know, relies heavily on the *Timaeus* (e.g. Philo, *De fuga* 62) and in Eudorus (Stobaeus *Ecl.* II.7.3).<sup>15</sup>

The Christian strategy is similar. Christians discuss the human final end from a cosmic and metaphysical perspective. Their starting point is God, his creation and his plan of salvation of the humankind. For the Christians, the creation of the world is not a neutral event but an event with ethical significance. As already mentioned in Chapter 2 and repeated in this chapter, early Christian philosophers maintained that God created the world so that he could exhibit his goodness and his love for the mankind. As we have seen, in their view, God's goodness entails that he is beneficial. The world's creation shows precisely that. Indeed, God exhibited his goodness in the world with the aim of educating man so that the latter becomes like God, that is, purely rational, good, and beneficial as well. Early Christian philosophers claimed that the creation of the world serves an important purpose: man's salvation. Origen, for instance, argues against Celsus, stating that everything has been created for the sake of mankind and all creation serves the education of human beings (*C. Cels.* IV.29, IV.74), which consists in understanding that God is the author of the world and utterly good (*Princ.* I.1.6). Christians such as Origen argue that this is the only way to understand God, that is, by understanding God's activities, since God's *ousia* is beyond the grasp of human beings.<sup>16</sup> The following passage conveys Origen's idea:

So the works of divine providence and the plan of this universe, are, as it were, rays of God's nature in contrast to his real substance and being, and because our intellect is of itself unable to behold God as he is, it understands the parent of the universe from the beauty of his works and the comeliness of his creatures.

(*Princ.* I.1.6)

Before Origen, Irenaeus, Clement, and Tertullian had already stressed that creation has no purpose other than to bring man to salvation. Irenaeus, for instance, argued that God has a plan to lead man to salvation, and creation is the first step towards its realization (*Adv. Haer.* V.18.1, V.28.4). The purpose, the *telos*, that explains God's

creation is man.<sup>17</sup> Lactantius also stresses this point, openly approving of the Stoics in this regard:

If you consider the operation of the universe, you will understand how true the doctrine of the Stoics is, who claim that the universe has been created for us. For everything that constitutes the universe and everything that it generates are made for the sake of man.

(*De ira Dei* 13.1)<sup>18</sup>

Tertullian describes the work of salvation as continuous with creation. God's plan for salvation, or the divine economy, runs unbroken from creation to Jesus, the seed of martyrs, concluding in the final judgement (*Apol.* 50.13). The human race, Tertullian says, is urged "to refer back to the beginning or to revise from the beginning" (*Adv. Marc.* V.17.1), to be reformed (III.9.5) and restored (III.15.1), a process that he calls *recapitulatio*, which is probably a translation of the Greek term *anakephalaïōsis*.<sup>19</sup>

This idea permeates the writings of many early Christian thinkers, but is particularly pronounced in Irenaeus.<sup>20</sup> According to this idea, already present in Paul's Letter to the Romans (Rom. 8:18–25), there will be an end to history, a point when everything will be perfected by God and all transgression and wickedness will finally be eliminated. Human nature will also be taken up by God and perfected, and thus will creation achieve its goal.

From this point of view, the correct understanding of God and God's creation is crucial for our attainment of happiness. This is how Christians justify their polemics against alternative theological views, such as those of pagans, Jews, and even certain Christians – the views of the Gnostics or of Arius and Eunomius. It is conspicuous that Christians accuse both pagans and Jews of not living virtuously on the grounds that both groups have a mistaken conception of God. Indeed, Christians go as far as to argue that pagans are atheists because the Gods they believe in are false, and that by believing in something false they do not believe in that which is true, namely the true God of the Christians. We find this line of thought, for instance, in Clement (*Strom.* VII.22–34)<sup>21</sup> but also in Origen. In his Prologue of his Commentary on the Song of Songs (Prol. 2.34) he distinguishes three uses of the term "God", principal, improper, and false. The name "God" in the principal sense applies to the Christian God alone, the creator of everything, as Origen says. Improper is the use of the name "God" for the angels, whereas false is the use of that name for the pagan gods.<sup>22</sup> For Origen this is an important distinction, given that he stresses as human final end the deification, which involves, as he claims, deification of both soul and body.<sup>23</sup> I would characterize this point of view as a theological perspective in ethics.

This is by no means an exclusively Christian perspective. It is rather the case that Christians conform to a general tendency. Plotinus is a clear case in this regard. He argues against the Gnostics, stating that the contemplation of God alone is hardly sufficient to determine one's final end, because this end depends on exactly how

one conceives of God, and Plotinus suggests that there are many different ways of doing so.

To say “look at God” does not help further unless it is specified how one should look at him. For what does it prevent, one would object, to look at God and still not refrain from any pleasure, or to be incontinent with regard to anger while appealing to God’s name, but still be ruled by all passions and make no effort to get rid of any of them? It is virtue that brings us to the end, and by being present in the soul it shows us God. Without real virtue God is nothing but a name.

(*Enn.* II.9.15.32–40, Armstrong, trans. modified)

The point that the passage makes is that virtue is a necessary condition for contemplating God. This is an intriguing idea. Plotinus apparently intends to say that one cannot convincingly claim that one contemplates God unless one’s soul is in a state that allows this contemplation to happen.<sup>24</sup> What is this state? Plotinus argues in many parts of his work that one should live the life of an intellectual being (e.g. *Enn.* I.1.3–5, I.2). This is a life in which the intellect rules and shapes one’s decisions, since human nature, he claims, is essentially intellectual (IV.4.18.10–12, VI.7.5.11–17). In this sense man, Plotinus claims, is always in contact with the intelligible realm (IV.8.8). This continuous contact with the intelligible realm, however, requires constant effort and is attained in stages, the first of which involves purification from bodily concerns and distractions. As is suggested in the *Phaedo* (66b–d, 69b–e), but also in *Republic X*, this is because the body prevents the soul from seeing reality (*Enn.* I.2.3.15–19, III.6.5.13–20). Only then can one move to higher levels of assimilation to intellectual life and contemplate the divine. In the same vein Clement claims that the veneration of God amounts to taking care of one’s soul (*Strom.* VII.1.3.1).<sup>25</sup> It is here that the right conception of the divine is important for ethics. Without that conception, the process of ethical progress inevitably stops. Later Neoplatonists develop this idea further.

If one takes the Gnostic view that the creator God is wicked, that the world is full of evil, and that only a few select people are destined for salvation, no matter how much others try, then humans cannot be motivated to become good in imitation of the world’s justice and goodness. The Gnostics would probably reply that they also believe in a good, benevolent, and wise God, whom they distinguish from the divine creator and whom they seek to contemplate. But this is not the point. The point that Plotinus makes is that their conception of God allows them to combine contemplation of the divine with disregard for virtue on the assumption that they are God’s elect people. This is why Plotinus associates the Gnostic viewpoint with the Epicurean in ethics (*Enn.* II.9.15), as Tertullian also does (*Adv. Marc.* V.19.7). For both Plotinus and Tertullian, a faulty conception of the divine bears heavily on one’s ethics. Clearly, in their view the final end of one’s assimilation to God requires a certain conception of God in order to count as a final end at all.

This is why early Christians insist on the right conception of God as a precondition for a happy life and for salvation. Athenagoras, for instance, argues that the purity of our life depends directly on our belief in God. This is because, he claims, we Christians are convinced that after death we will give an account to our maker and that we will be rewarded for our piety. Athenagoras refers in this context to Plato's similar claim about the two judges of mankind, Minos and Rhadamanthys.<sup>26</sup> Clement insists on the role of divine wisdom and divine economy as guides in our ethics. We do not acquire this wisdom of the divine directly, however, but through its manifestation in the sensible world. This is reminiscent of the Stoics, who also thought that the study of the natural world contributes to our knowledge of the good, of the divine.<sup>27</sup> For both Stoics and early Christians this knowledge bears directly on our ethics. Origen on the other hand claims that the human soul acquires knowledge of God's purpose in creation when it lives the disembodied life of an intellect; this knowledge, he suggests, amounts to knowing our place in the world (*Commentary to Song of Songs*, prol. 2.26–32).<sup>28</sup> Such evidence shows that it is mainly the cosmological and the theological perspectives on ethics that shape late ancient ethics, pagan as well as Christian.

One objection is possible here. The reader may have noticed that the Christians speak of the human final end not only in terms of happiness (*eudaimonia*), as is the case in the pagan philosophical tradition, but also in terms of salvation (*sotēria*) and they speak indeed of a divine plan of salvation. The latter term gradually becomes dominant and permeates the writings of early Christian philosophers. One can arguably discern here a difference between the ethics of Hellenic philosophy and that of early Christianity. There is another, similar, objection. Pagan philosophers speak of virtue and vice, goodness and wickedness, while Christians also speak of sin, which they identify with human vice. This may be yet another difference between pagan and Christian ethics.

I doubt, however, that either of these objections are justified. Pagan philosophers in late antiquity also speak of salvation and acknowledge it as the human final end. For Porphyry, for instance, salvation is a central topic. He defines the salvation of the soul as the state in which man attains similarity to God (*Adv. Marc.* 8, 24, 32–34) and he maintains that this consists in one's intellectual contemplation of God or the Good, which in his view presupposes release from bodily desires.<sup>29</sup> There was in fact a controversy between Porphyry and Iamblichus, which we can detect in their writings, on how we can attain salvation. While Porphyry claimed that this aim could be achieved through virtue and contemplation, which only philosophy offers (*On Abstinence* II.49.12), Iamblichus suggested instead that this end cannot be attained through thought alone but also requires specific rituals of invoking God, a tradition that goes back to Apollonius of Tyana (*On Mysteries* I.3.9, II.11.96–97).<sup>30</sup> The important point for us here is that Christian thinkers are not exceptional but rather in tune with the spirit of their age when they speak of salvation.

This is also the case regarding sin.<sup>31</sup> Christians are not exceptional in speaking of sin; pagan philosophers speak of it similarly. Plotinus, for instance, claims that



“our end is not to avoid sin (*hamartia*) but to become like God” (*Enn.* I.2.6.2–3; cf. II.9.9.12–14). Obviously for Plotinus sin is a failure, but avoiding it is not sufficient for attaining our final end. One can object, of course, that the use of the same term does not amount to sharing the same concept. Clearly, however, both sides, pagans and Christians, consider sin to be one’s failure to do good. Additionally, both sides agree on two further points: first, that such a failure does not do justice to human nature, which is essentially intellectual; and, second, that avoidance of sin is hardly the goal of human life. To be sure, pagans and Christians disagree on what counts as sin. But, as we shall see below, not even Christians are unanimous on that issue. Tertullian, for instance, finds sex sinful and condemns it even within marriage, a view that clearly not every contemporary Christian shared.

One might still argue, however, that this similarity between the pagan and the Christian tradition in ethics does not mean that early Christian philosophers share the pagan conception of human final end, specifically defined as salvation. I can see two possible differences between the Christian and the Hellenic ideal. The first is that for the pagan philosophers this is a prospect attainable entirely in earthly life, whereas for the Christians this is a largely, but not exclusively, otherworldly prospect. Christians think of salvation as something achieved mainly not in this life but after the resurrection. For Christians the life after the resurrection counts as an afterlife, a new life, with a purified soul and an ethereal body (as we have seen in Chapter 5 pp. 194–195). They admit, however, that one can have earlier intimations of salvation. Clement, for instance, speaks of the “life above” (*anō zōē*; *QDS* 22.4), that is, the life of faith and intellectual contemplation. In this regard he resembles Platonists such as Plotinus and Porphyry, who claim that the essence of man, the intellect, can always be in contact with the intellectual realm, which they describe as “out there” (*ekei*), yet they consider this aim realizable during embodied life. We see, then, that on this point the difference between Christians and pagans is not a big one.

The other difference, in my view, is that for the Greek philosophers the ideal of salvation can be achieved entirely through man’s own powers, while the Christians insist that it can be realized also with God’s assistance, or God’s grace. As we saw in Chapter 4, Christian thinkers maintain that we cannot succeed in becoming similar to God by relying only on our powers. What we must do is show our commitment to this end so that we draw the grace of God, which can help us achieve it. As we have seen, Clement capitalized on this idea. He speaks of the divine economy and of the divine plan of salvation, in which we can take part if we lead the Christian life. There is something similar to this idea in Iamblichus’ view of theurgy, mentioned above. According to this view the soul cannot ascend to the divine realm through the capacity of thought alone; rather, the soul has to be purified through practices such as prayer, sacrifice, and the ritual use of material objects (*On Mysteries* I.3.9). The crucial element in Iamblichus’ view, which is of relevance here, is that there are limits to what man can achieve by relying on philosophy and thought alone. The Christian notion of grace is markedly different, however, insofar as Christians assume that God will help humans attain

their final end, that is, assimilation to God, as well as restore the original goodness of everything, including that of human nature (on this, see below). Besides, the Christians differ from their pagan contemporaries in maintaining that God has set a whole plan of salvation in motion by the incarnation and resurrection of Christ.<sup>32</sup> The doctrine of incarnation plays a key role in this doctrine: while both pagans and Christians speak of assimilation to God, Christians also speak of the unity of God with humanity. It is in a sense God's assimilation to man that informs the Christian ethical ideal.

## Christian virtue

The question now is how Christians can attain the human final end aim outlined above, the assimilation to God, which they identify with salvation. Here it is crucial to remember that this ethical ideal, in either its pagan or Christian form, is grounded in a specific conception of human nature, which we need to understand before we go further.

According to this conception of human nature, man comprises three elements: body, soul, and intellect. As we have seen in the previous chapter, not all Christians accept this distinction. All of them, however, appear to accept the distinction between an inner and an outer man.<sup>33</sup> The inner man amounts to the essence of man, the soul or the intellect, while the outer man to the body. Origen, for instance, operates with this distinction.<sup>34</sup> Depending on the psychological view one takes, the inner man corresponds to either the soul or to the intellect/spirit. The outer man, on the other hand, comprises either the body or the body and the soul, that is, the living body which includes the soul that is responsible for life functions. Although not all Christian philosophers explicitly endorse this distinction between an inner and an outer man, they do appear to operate with such a view. Those who openly speak of an inner man and an outer man are those who adopt a tripartite view of human nature: body, soul, spirit.

Contemporary Platonists make a similar distinction between an inner man and an outer man. In Plotinus and Porphyry this distinction is quite central.<sup>35</sup> Plotinus distinguishes between the composite of body and soul and the intellect, or the intellectual, higher soul, which is identified with our true self (*hēmeis*; *Enn.* I.1.7.1–6). The distinction, however, in some form goes back to Plato (*Rep.* 589a; *ho entos anthrōpos*) and Aristotle (*N.E.* 1178b20–1179a10). Both Plato and Aristotle distinguish between the intellect, that is, the eye of the soul (*Rep.* 533d2), and the human agent, who acts and is guided and constrained by human needs. We find Paul implying the same distinction when he speaks of the inner man, who respects God's law but whose body is subject to a different law, which opposes the law of his intellect (*Rom.* 7:22–23). The distinction between an inner and an outer man appears in a pronounced form in Clement. In *The Rich Man's Salvation*, Clement speaks of the inner wealth and beauty stored in an earthen vessel (*QDS* 34; cf. *1 Cor.* 4:7), and in the *Protrepticus* he makes the distinction in even stronger terms: he distinguishes between the true man, who is

created in the image of God and whom he identifies with the intellect, and the earthly man in the flesh.

And an image of the Word [*Logos*] is the true man, that is, the intellect [*nous*] in man, who on this account is said to have been created “in the image” of God, and “in his likeness” [Gen. 1:26], because through his understanding heart he is made like the divine Word, and so reasonable. Of the earthly, visible man there are images in the form of the statues which are far away from the truth and nothing but a temporary impression upon matter. It seems to be, then, that nothing else but madness has taken possession of life, when it spends so much energy upon matter.

(*Protr.* X.98.4, Butterworth, trans. modified)

Clement’s comparison of the earthly man to a statue that is distant from the true man also occurs later in Plotinus, who compares the corporeal man with an artist’s image (*Enn.* VI.7.5.11–17). Plotinus calls the corporeal man the “image of man” (*eidōlon anthrōpou*) and the “lesser man” (*elattōi anthrōpon*). Tertullian speaks in similar terms, as well. In his *De anima* he distinguishes the human effigies, the body, from the inner man (*De an.* 9.7). Similarly, Origen distinguishes the part of man that is made in the likeness of God, which is “in the so-called inner man”.<sup>36</sup> Origen’s way of speaking suggests that the distinction between inner and outer man had become common in his time. Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa make frequent use of this distinction in their writings.<sup>37</sup>

Now this distinction stems from a distinction between two levels of life, bodily and intellectual, and, accordingly, from a distinction between two corresponding levels of virtue: one that applies to man as a composite of body and soul or living body; and one that applies to the intellectual soul or to the intellect, the real self as is often called. It is on these grounds that Plotinus and Porphyry distinguish different levels of virtue. Since they value the inner man, the intellect, more than the composite of soul and body, they distinguish levels of virtue hierarchically. They distinguish essentially between the political virtue of the acting individual and the intellectual virtue of the contemplating or thinking individual. Later Neoplatonists will add more distinctions and elaborate on this scheme.<sup>38</sup> We find the doctrine of degrees of virtue in the work of early Christian thinkers as well.

Clement clearly distinguishes levels of virtue. He defines the lower level of virtue, that is, political virtue, in Aristotelian terms. It is the middle state (*Strom.* II.13.59.6), which corresponds to the Aristotelian mean. The mean is thought of as a state of self-containment, as a way of avoiding excesses. Clement understands Aristotle’s mean as *metriopatheia*, that is, a state of moderate emotions (*Strom.* VII.3.13.3), which is how Aristotle’s mean is understood in Hellenistic times by figures such as Antiochus of Ascalon, for instance. Clement argues this in several places in his work (*Paed.* II.1.16.4; *Strom.* II.13.109.1), and he appears to apply the idea of moderation in all manner of everyday activities.<sup>39</sup> Yet elsewhere Clement maintains that the Christian ideal lies in the extirpation of all emotions, that is,

in *apatheia*, on the (originally Stoic) assumption that emotions are non-rational responses or faulty judgements and as such are by definition mistaken. He claims that the Christian Gnostic should incline towards *apatheia*, a condition close to divine nature (*Strom.* II.18.80.6–81.1) and should not merely strive towards the mean or *metriopatheia* (VII.3.13.3). This is indeed the ideal that Clement considers fitting for the Christian Gnostic, the Christian wise man, the equivalent of the Stoic sage.<sup>40</sup>

Clement explains that there is no tension here between two incompatible ideals. He actually appears to promote one ideal in the *Paedagogus*, namely political virtue, and another in the later books of his *Stromata*, which addresses specifically the Christian Gnostic. In his later work Clement argues for the interdependence of virtues (*tōn aretōn akolouthiai*; *Strom.* II.18.78.1–80.4). Clement suggests that all virtues are interrelated on the basis of the role of *Logos* in the economy of salvation.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, Clement uses the contrast between the morality of the Old Testament and that of the Gospels to describe the difference between the simple believer and the more advanced one, the Christian Gnostic, the perfect Christian. The former, Clement claims, aims at the purification of the soul by avoiding all evils, while the Gnostic aims at the perfection that consists in becoming similar to God, that is, leading a life driven by theoretical preoccupations.<sup>42</sup> It is intriguing that Clement even distinguishes two kinds of faith in this connection: common faith, which is shared by all Christians, and a special faith which motivates the soul toward enquiry.<sup>43</sup> Clement also stresses the importance of love for attaining this ideal of the perfect Christian, the one who possesses wisdom and is eager to enquire. Love is not another emotion, but rather, as Clement claims, the expression of one's affinity with God (*Strom.* VI.9.73.3–74.1).<sup>44</sup>

The emphasis on love is a distinctly Christian point. Early Christians do not urge their fellow Christians to be righteous, but to be loving. Justin argues that the person who loves will wish for the others the same “good things that he wishes for himself” and will abstain from wishing evil things (*Dial.* 93).<sup>45</sup> Justin is rephrasing here the so-called Golden Rule I mentioned earlier – the commandment is now not to do to others what you want them to do to you but to demand love insofar as one wishes love from the others. Tertullian and Clement also identify action in accordance to the Golden Rule with love.<sup>46</sup> In a remarkable passage, Clement brings together the theme of our equality against God, the role of love for our fellow human beings, and the role of simplicity in our lives:

God brought our race into communion by first imparting what was His own, when He gave His own Word, common to all, and made all things for all. All things therefore are common, and not for the rich to appropriate an undue share. That expression, therefore, “I possess, and possess in abundance: why then should I not enjoy?” is suitable neither to the man, nor to society. But more worthy of love is that: “I have: why should I not give to those who need?” For such a one – one who fulfils the command, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” – is perfect. For this is the true luxury – the treasured

wealth. But that which is squandered on foolish lusts is to be reckoned waste, not expenditure. For God has given to us, I know well, the liberty of use, but only so far as necessary; and He has determined that the use should be common. And it is monstrous for one to live in luxury, while many are in want. How much more glorious is it to do good to many, than to live sumptuously! How much wiser to spend money on human being, than on jewels and gold! How much more useful to acquire decorous friends, than lifeless ornaments! Whom have lands ever benefited so much as conferring favours has? It remains for us, therefore, to do away with this allegation: Who, then, will have the more sumptuous things, if all select the simpler?"

(*Paed.* II.8)

The passage suggests that our common descent from God, our common nature, is a source of norms. We owe to each other goodness and love. This is what Basil, for instance, stresses, that we ought to do good to our neighbour (*Hex.* 9.3). But we also owe love to each other, as Clement argues. Love is not an emotion, let alone a desire, but a relation of affection, and a way to exist with the others in a community.<sup>47</sup> Since love is a divine feature that we should imitate and we owe to each other, love is a virtue for the Christians, and indeed a very important one. Love then is a Christian virtue and a feature of the relationship between God and humankind; we should be loving the others and in such a way we get to know God and become like Him. I find this a distinctly feature of Christianity and Christian ethics in particular.

The rest of Clement's ethical outlook, especially regarding the nature of virtue, can also be found in Philo and Plutarch. Philo appears to recognize the importance of affections as important elements of human nature that operate as helpers (*boethoi*) for us in life, as they tell us what needs to be heeded (*Legum Allegoriae* II.8); however, in the same work Philo subscribes to the ideal of *apatheia* (II.100–102). This is also the case with Plutarch, who supports both ideals in different works. This, however, is not a problem or a contradiction. Although Plutarch does not state it openly, it is fairly clear that he operates with two levels of virtue and two moral ideals: that of political virtue, which consists in the moderation of emotions; and the higher virtue, which consists in the elimination of non-rational emotions (*apatheia*), which he associates with the state of assimilation to God (Plutarch, *De virt. mor.* 444D; *De def. orac.* 470E). But, as we have seen earlier, one must already have some virtue in order to be able to link oneself to God. This level of virtue amounts to the moderation of the affections. Plotinus and Porphyry similarly make the first level of virtue a requirement for attaining the higher one, and therefore they claim that the higher levels encompass all virtue (Plotinus, *Enn.* I.2.3–5; Porphyry, *Sent.* 32).

Now, this higher ethical ideal of a life in which all strong affections are eliminated has further consequences and was a source of controversy among early Christian thinkers. Some of them maintain a strict morality that does not allow for any bodily pleasures, and they defend an ascetic ideal. We already find this in the

New Testament, especially in Paul's Letters. As is well known, Paul remained celibate, regarding marriage inferior to that ideal (1 Cor. 7:1, 7:8–9). In later letters, however, Paul approves of marriage (1 Tim. 2:15, 5:14).

An even stricter morality was characteristic of a group of Christians inspired by Montanus (second century), the Montanists, who favoured strict moralism and ascetic ideals.<sup>48</sup> Tertullian's ideas are similar; he is a representative of strict early Christian moralism. He famously criticized a second marriage as adultery (*De monogamia* 9) and expressed disdain for bodily pleasure (*De spectaculis* 28–29), which led him to renounce sex even within marriage (*De uxore* 3.2, 4.5).<sup>49</sup> Strict moralism and asceticism would be highly influential in early Christianity. Asceticism, however, was by no means a Christian phenomenon. Rather, once again, Christianity conforms to a general cultural tendency. Platonist philosophers like Plotinus were famously ascetic, and this was clearly a practice of purification directed at the burden of the body, a practice essential for attaining the first level of virtue, the so-called cathartic or purificatory virtue (Justin 1 *Apol.* 8; Clement, *QDS* 16, 18; Plotinus, *Enn.* I.6.5–6; Gregory, *De an.* 89D, GNO 66.9–20).

There was yet another issue that caused controversy among early Christian philosophers, namely the issue of the end of the world and the punishment of sinful souls. Origen defended the idea that God's *Logos* will ultimately prevail in the world and will bring everything to a state of perfection (*C. Cels.* VIII.72). There will then be a restoration of everything to the original beauty and order that characterized creation in the beginning (*apokatastasis*). This restoration will involve human nature, which will be liberated from sin and perfected. For Origen this world is only a trial and God's punishments serve only as means of education and cannot be everlasting.<sup>50</sup> This belief was widely held also in the fourth century.<sup>51</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, however, continued to endorse it (*De an.* 108A, 148AC, GNO 79.12–17, 112.18–113.19).<sup>52</sup> He agreed with Origen that God's judgement aims only to remove evil from the world (100BC, GNO 73.17–74.11).

At the opposite end we find Tertullian, who emphasizes God's final judgement, which will bring the sensible world to an end (*Adv. Marc.* IV.10.12). This judgement brings with it eternal reward for the just and eternal punishment for the sinners (*Apol.* 50.2; *Praescr.* 13.1). What is new here is not reward and punishment in the afterlife; we find this in the work of pagan philosophers, starting with Plato in *Republic* X, as well as in the philosophy of late antiquity (e.g. Atticus fr. 7 *Des Places*). The innovation of early Christianity are the states of salvation and damnation, paradise and hell, which Tertullian eloquently describes (*Apol.* 11.11, 47.12). Tertullian's picture gives rise to the question as to how all this can be compatible with God's goodness and love. It is the view that God's activities manifest his goodness that eventually lead Origen and Gregory of Nyssa to maintain the final restoration of everything, including human nature, to the original good state that God initially established with creation.

Let me now return to the question I posed earlier, namely whether the ethics of early Christianity is unlike the ethics of the Hellenic philosophical tradition, as Anscombe (1958) argued, or is rather similar to it, especially to Stoic ethics,

as some modern scholars have argued. From what we have seen above, there is a good deal of similarity between early Christian ethics and contemporary Platonist ethics. We have also encountered some similarities between Christian and Stoic ethics. These include the adoption of the theological perspective in ethics, which, as we have seen, Christians themselves pointed out, as well as the commitment to the ideal of the elimination of passions (*apatheia*). The latter, however, was not an exclusively Stoic ideal; it was also maintained by Platonists. From what we have seen, there is considerable common ground between the ethics of Platonists such as Plutarch, Plotinus, and Porphyry, as well as Epictetus and Seneca, on the one hand, and Christians such as Justin, Clement, Origen, and Gregory on the other. It seems to me that both Anscombe, who stresses the role of law in Christian ethics, as well as those who underline the Stoic perspective of early Christian ethics, refer mainly to the New Testament and specifically to Paul's Letters.<sup>53</sup> Christian ethics changes, however, when we move to Clement, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa. They outline much more sophisticated ethical theories built on their views on human nature. And these, I have argued, are remarkably close to contemporary Platonist theories of ethics.

### The Christian society

As I have said in the Introduction, Christians worked hard to establish a Christian identity in the pagan societies they inhabited. But this project created a tension. For, on the one hand, they argued that Christianity was nothing new but rather the fulfilment of the *Logos* operating within the history of humankind; yet, on the other hand, they systematically criticized pagans and Jews for their beliefs, which they considered an aberration of the *Logos*, misguided, and false. One standard topic in this critique was their criticism of pagan norms and morals. Yet on the other hand early Christians were confronted with the problem of how they should fit in a non-Christian society, that is, which norms of that society to adopt and which not to. This was a complex and difficult problem that Christians had to address. Did they have to abide by the laws of the non-Christian society in which they lived? And, if they did, how should they assess the laws of non-Christians, which often included laws ordaining the worship of the Roman emperor, for instance? Were some pagan laws just and others unjust, and what should be the criterion for that distinction? Should the criterion for such a distinction be a specifically Christian one or not? More generally, did Christians have to accept the existing pagan political order of the Roman empire, or should they aspire to create a new Christian one? Christians had to take a stance on all these questions because they were often portrayed as enemies of the Roman Empire and their loyalty to the Roman emperor was in doubt.<sup>54</sup>

Such political concerns explain the fact that the two *Apologies* of Justin Martyr (c. 153–160) were addressed to the emperors Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius, that Athenagoras' *Plea for Christians* (*Legatio*, c. 177) was addressed to Marcus Aurelius and Commodus, as was also the case with Theophilus' *To Autolykus* some years

later (181).<sup>55</sup> Around 200 CE Tertullian writes his *Apology*, addressing the governors of Africa, in order to offer a justification of the Christian way of life in a non-Christian society and to dispel the charges of Christian disloyalty to Roman rulers. The political issues I have mentioned above were already addressed, however, in the earliest Christian documents, such as Paul's Letters and the *Letter to Diognetus*. In these writings we find claims to the effect that Christians are ordinary members of their contemporary non-Christian society, but we also hear of specific norms that make Christians a special group, norms based on a divinely ordained morality or a morality of revelation. Paul acknowledges, on the one hand, the political authority of the state and encourages Christians to respect it on the grounds that the civic authorities are subordinate to God (Rom. 13:1–4), but in the same context he goes on to specify the duties of Christians to one another (Rom. 13:8–15).<sup>56</sup> In the *Letter to Diognetus*, we hear that Christians are not different from other citizens in terms of conduct and customs, yet their manner of life is different: “they dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners . . . They obey the prescribed laws and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives” (*Letter to Diognetus* ch. 5).

These two elements of Christian life, the obedience to pagan laws and the wish to transcend them, point to a certain difficulty – how is it possible for Christians (who, as they themselves believe, adhere to divinely inspired norms) also to adhere to the norms of a non-Christian society, such as the laws of the Roman empire? This was a first-order challenge for Christian believers in general, as well as for Christian philosophers more specifically. While the former had to deal with this issue practically, the latter had to engage with it theoretically and work out a Christian position. There was also a second-order challenge addressed exclusively by Christian philosophers, namely whether in their view the ethical and political norms of non-Christian society should be replaced by Christian ones, to what extent this should be the case, and how this should be accomplished.<sup>57</sup>

Early Christian thinkers, such as Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Eusebius, and Lactantius, seem to be divided on whether Christians make up a special part of the society they live in. Their diverging views on this issue have a bearing on the views they take regarding current political norms, on whether non-Christian norms should be respected or replaced with Christian ones, and to what extent. As we will see, we find two main models in the works of these Christian thinkers: one that distinguishes between political and ethical norms and accepts pagan political norms while promoting specifically Christian ethical norms; and another that conflates political and ethical norms and urges their replacement with Christian ones. As we can imagine, the crucial issue in this debate centres on the source of normativity, namely whether it is God, the emperor, nature, reason, or a combination of those.

Justin Martyr is the earliest Christian philosopher who engages with the issue of non-Christian norms. Addressing the emperors Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius, Justin argues that both subjects and rulers are equally responsible for the prosperity of the state and is critical of the view in Plato's *Republic* that rulers are given a privileged position (1 *Apol.* 3.2–4). Justin rejects a view that might have



been inspiring for the two emperors he addresses, who are systematically presented in the *Apology* as examples of piety and devoted philosophers,<sup>58</sup> namely the view that cities will attain happiness if rulers become philosophers. Justin argues instead that the tasks of rulers and subjects are separate yet have something in common. The task of the subjects, he says, especially the Christian subjects, is to make their lives and opinions transparent, while the task of the ruler is to judge well. Both, however, should lead a virtuous life and both are equally important for the happiness of the state. I quote the relevant passage:

Every reasonable person would find good and fair the entreaty that subjects should give a blameless account of their life and thought and that rulers should similarly carry out their decisions not with violence and tyranny but as followers of piety and philosophy. In this way both rulers and subjects would fare well. For one of the ancients said, “unless the rulers become philosophers, the cities cannot attain happiness.” It is our task, then, to offer to all the opportunity of surveying our life and teachings, so that we ourselves should not bear the blame for what those who do not really know about us do in their ignorance. But it falls to you, as reason demands, to give us a hearing and show yourself to be a good judge. For you will have no defense before God if you know the truth but do not do what is right.

(1 *Apol.* 3.2–5)

Justin clearly admits here that rulers, especially educated rulers like Antoninus and Marcus Aurelius, should be able to judge well despite the fact that they are not Christians. Justin does single out Christians as a special, divinely favoured, class in his second *Apology* (2 *Apol.* 7.1), but he does not expect the emperors to appreciate that; he only expects the rulers to be inspired by piety and philosophy quite generally. If they do that, they will judge well and do what is just (*ta dikaiá poi-ein*). This crucially involves tolerating the Christians and not charging them with imaginary crimes, as others do. Apparently, piety and justice are not specifically Christian characteristics for Justin; not only can they be found among pagans, but Justin clearly implies that they are valued in pagan society and the pagan rulers in particular respect them. This is why a little earlier in the same work Justin refers to Plato’s *Apology* 30c, when he argues that the rulers who condemn the innocent harm themselves, for according to Plato doing injustice confers harm to the agent. Presumably Justin takes the view that there are several important values or norms, such as piety and justice, shared by all reasonable and educated people, Christians and non-Christians alike, to the extent that all are guided by reason. In this regard Christianity upholds a valued pagan tradition.

One thing that is notable in the passage cited above is that Justin does not dispute the status of the Roman emperor or his claim to rule; he rather grants him that right and takes it as a starting point for his reflections. The question that he raises is how the emperors should make good use of this right. And, as we have seen, he urges them to follow reason and stay true to their characteristic virtues, to

piety and philosophy. Justin's emphasis on the virtuous character of the emperors functions as justification of their imperial authority. Justin must have said more on this topic in his *On God's only Rule or On God's Monarchy* (*Peri theou monarchias*), which is lost today; we know of its existence through the testimony of Eusebius (*H.E.* IV.18.4). We can only speculate about the thesis of that work. Athenagoras' *Plea for Christians* may give us a hint that would help us reconstruct Justin's position. Athenagoras finds the joint rulership of Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus to parallel that of God the Father and God the Son.

I wish that you, by yourselves, should discover the heavenly kingdom also! For as all things are subservient to you, father and son, who have received the kingdom from above (for the king's soul is in the hand of God [Proverbs 21:1] says the prophetic Spirit), so to the one God and the Logos proceeding from Him, the Son, conceived as inseparable from Him, all things are similarly subjected.

(*Legatio* 18.2)

This is a striking passage. Athenagoras not only compares the earthly rulership of the Roman emperors with that of the heavenly kingdom of God the Father and God the Son, but he further states that the Roman emperors have been granted their political authority from the Christian God. While imperial authority consists in being served and respected by all, God's power consists in having everything subjected to him. Athenagoras takes the bold step of justifying the political authority of the Roman monarchy by comparing it to the divine one. Justin Martyr may well have done the same in his lost *On God's Monarchy*. The point of such an attitude was apparently to stress that Christians not only accept the existing political order, but they furthermore find it theologically justified.

Tertullian displays a similar attitude towards the Roman emperor. He considers the Roman emperor to be a feature of the order of creation that is ultimately dependent on God's power.<sup>59</sup> More specifically, Tertullian suggests that on earth the emperor is what God is in heaven and claims that it is God who appointed the emperor to his position and granted him the power that he has. The emperor's power, Tertullian says, comes from the same source that is responsible for our soul, namely God. Therefore, he continues, the Christians pray for the emperor's health because he serves God:

The emperor is great because he is inferior to heaven. He himself belongs to God, who owns heaven and all creation. This is whence the emperor comes, by him who made man before making him emperor. The power of emperor has the same source as that of his spirit.

(*Apol.* 30.3)

Tertullian's position resembles that of Athenagoras in justifying the political power of the Roman emperor by claiming that the emperor is appointed by God and that

the emperor operates like God on earth. In the same context, Tertullian goes further than Athenagoras in encouraging Christians to respect the emperor's rule,<sup>60</sup> a point that Justin also implicitly made. In other parts of his work Tertullian explicitly denies the divinity of the Roman emperor, but this is because he sees emperors as subordinate to God, not as gods themselves, although he agrees with the Roman custom of granting the emperor divine honours after death (*Apol.* 13.8). We should not be surprised, then, to find Tertullian arguing that Christians should be loyal to the Roman emperor and that they should respect the laws and the customs of the society in which they live (*Ad Nationes* I.17.4). Tertullian makes this point by way of responding to a common charge against Christians, according to which Christians do not abide by the laws of the cities they live in. In this context Tertullian makes an interesting comment about the nature of law:

The laws punish Christians. If the Christians did something wrong, this must become public. There is no law to prevent an investigation. In fact, an investigation functions in the interest of the law. How will you enforce the law if you pass over the very offense that the law forbids, failing to take account of the available evidence? No law can rely on its own account of its righteousness, but it owes such an account to those from whom it demands obedience. Moreover, a law becomes suspect if it shows no tendency to prove itself. Thus the laws against the Christians are rightly held to be worthy of respect and compliance but only as long as no one knows what they punish. Once the truth is known, however, namely that these laws enforced their code with swords, crosses, and lions, they are vehemently rejected as supremely unjust . . . For an unjust law has no value.

(*Ad Nationes* 1.6.4–7; Sider trans.)

Tertullian's aim here is to criticize the imperial laws that punish the Christians. Historians of this period tell us that there was no such specific law.<sup>61</sup> There certainly were, however, imperial decrees against the Christians or similar imperial decisions ordering the severe punishment or even execution of Christians.<sup>62</sup> The important point in the passage cited above is how Tertullian argues against anti-Christian political orders: he condemns the fact that such orders did not rely on any investigation about the actual deeds of Christians. The existing evidence shows that this is true: Christians were arrested and punished for their identity alone and were proved innocent by denying their faith and by sacrificing to pagan Gods.<sup>63</sup> Tertullian asks what exactly the crime of Christians is and what exactly the legislation against them punishes. In this regard Tertullian continues along the lines of reasoning established by Justin Martyr and Athenagoras, who appeal to the sound reason and the virtues of Roman emperors, such as piety, who were often misguided by widespread prejudices against the Christians. Unlike Justin and Athenagoras, however, Tertullian makes an important point about the nature of law here. A law, he says, is not respectable because of its status as a law but because of its justification, an account of which should be available to all subjects

to the law. It is this account or justification that makes a law what it is – a part of justice.

Tertullian does not make any reference to Christian values or norms here; he implies that a law neither has to be inspired by Christian doctrine nor should be issued by a Christian ruler, and what is essential to the law is that it be just. Tertullian does not hold that there are specific Christian criteria according to which a law is just. A law can be just or unjust no matter who the ruler is and what his religious convictions are. Tertullian declares loyalty to the current political order and to the imperial laws, provided they are just. He does not have any expectations for Christians to be treated differently. Like Justin Martyr, Tertullian's only plea is for justice.

Tertullian differs from Justin Martyr, however, in claiming that Christians do not make up a special class; rather, Christians are members of the same community in which everyone else belongs, namely the world (*Apol.* 38.3). Tertullian argues that Christians are not motivated by earthly or political concerns; they do not rule the world, but only worship God and strive to understand the Scriptures well (*Apol.* 39.3). Such motivations, though, do not set them apart from the rest of their fellow citizens; rather, Christians are united with them in respecting the law and the emperor (*Ad Nationes* 1.17.3). Tertullian further claims that Christians are not only brothers to each other, as was commonly thought, but also to their pagan fellow citizens (*Apol.* 39.1–2, 8–9). Just like them, Christians also pray for their emperors, ministers, officers, for what binds all of them together is, Tertullian says, the law of nature, our common mother, as he calls it. The relevant passage merits quotation:

Now I myself will explain the practices of the Christian society, that is, after having refuted the charges that they are evil, I myself will also point out that they are good. We constitute a body as a result of our common religious convictions, the unity of our life, and the bond of our hope. We form a group and a congregation aiming to siege God with our prayers. This violence pleases God. We also pray for our emperors, their ministers and their powers, for the present state, or the peace in the world, for the delay of the end . . . Over the fact that we call ourselves brothers, people fall into rage. We are your brothers too, however, according to the law of nature, our common mother. And yet with how much more right are they called brothers and considered such those who have acknowledged one father, God, and who have drunk one spirit of holiness, who in fear and wonder have come forth from the one womb of their common ignorance to the one light of the truth?

(*Apol.* 39.1–2, 8–9; Sider trans.)

Tertullian does not deny that Christians make up a community and indeed a fraternity, but he denies that this sets them apart from their fellow citizens; rather, he says, they also count as brothers, since they have a common mother, nature.<sup>64</sup> Tertullian clearly refers to human nature here. All humans, he suggests, are brothers

to each other by virtue of sharing both a mother and a father: human nature and God. Those who acknowledge God as their father have more of a right to be called brothers; such are the Christians. Tertullian does not specify here the sense in which humans have God as their father, but he does this in *De anima*. As we have seen in Chapter 4, Tertullian specifies that God breathed life into the first human and through him into all humans, which means that God's spirit makes up the human soul that is propagated from parents to their children with the help of our common mother – nature.<sup>65</sup> It is in this sense that all humans are brothers. And this means that all humans share the same nature, and therefore must be subject to the same law, the law of nature. Christians do not make up a separate class of citizens. They do what all others do, he says: work as sailors, farmers, and traders; they share the marketplaces, factories, inns, and baths (*Apol.* 42.1), and they are subject to the same laws.

Yet, while Tertullian emphasizes the common nature of all humans and the fact that all are subject to the same law of nature, he also stresses the moral superiority of Christians. He argues that Christians abide by the law and it is the pagans who bring destruction to the state (*Apol.* 39.19–21). Tertullian further contrasts Christians with the morally flawed pagans, including individual pagan philosophers (*Apol.* 46.8–47.10). Several other Christian contemporaries express similar views. Clement of Alexandria, for instance, speaks at great length about the aim of the Christian sage, the Gnostic, to achieve perfection, which requires a specific sort of knowledge, namely knowledge of the Christian God and of the Christian doctrine. As I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, such knowledge helps the Christian sage achieve the final aim of becoming similar to God (*Strom.* VI.7.60.1–3). The critical point here is the distinction between two hierarchical levels of norms, the political and the ethical. Tertullian accepts the normative character of public laws, to which both Christians and pagans are subjected, and yet he stresses the superiority of Christians on the level of morality.

Tertullian conforms with a widespread tendency among early Christians, which we have encountered in the writings of Paul, in the *Letter to Diognetus*, and in Athenagoras' *Plea for Christians*. Athenagoras claims that the task of Christians is not merely to be just, but rather to be good and forbearing,<sup>66</sup> and he goes on to speak of Christians' duties to themselves and to others with reference to Christ's resurrection (*Legatio* 35–36). These are specific Christian values, which are thought to be on a higher level than justice, and which could also be achieved by non-Christians. This dualism of norms, political on the one hand and moral on the other, is also implied in a passage from Theophilus' *To Autolytus*:

Accordingly, I will pay honour to the emperor not by worshipping him but by praying for him. I worship the God who is the real and true God, since I know that the emperor was made by him. You will say to me, "Why do you not worship the emperor?" Because he was made not to be worshipped but to be honoured with legitimate honour. He is not God but a man appointed by God [Rom. 13.1], not to be worshipped but to judge justly. For in a

certain way he has been entrusted with a stewardship [1 Cor. 9:17] from God. He himself has subordinates whom he does not permit to be called emperors, for “emperor” is his name and it is not right for another to be given this title. Similarly, worship must be given to no other person but to God alone.

(*To Autolyceus* I.11, Grant, trans. modified)

Theophilus takes a position similar to that of Athenagoras and Tertullian in presenting the emperor as God’s appointed ruler. Theophilus, however, puts more emphasis on the difference between the emperor and God. The emperor, he argues, is not divine and accordingly does not merit worship, as God does, but only honour. The emperor deserves honour because he is appointed by God and his job is to judge justly. An important feature of the above passage is that the Christians accept a hierarchy of authorities: God, the emperor, and his officers. Accordingly, they accept a hierarchy of sources of norms: the emperor is responsible for justice in the state, while God is the ultimate source of norms. There is no conflict between the two, at least in principle, because for the Christians the emperor has been appointed by God in order to bring justice to human society. Obedience to law is then part of the Christian’s duties, since the emperor is appointed by God, but clearly the Christian should acknowledge God as the sovereign source of all norms and obey God’s commands.

One of the most interesting early Christian texts on the topic of the relationship between God and the Roman emperor is Eusebius’ *Panegyric for Constantine* (*Laus Constantini*). Eusebius speaks of a specific divinely elected ruler, Constantine. Eusebius presents Constantine as the model of a Roman emperor who is set up as a ruler by God and goes as far as to compare Constantine with God’s *Logos*, who plays the role of a mediator between God and the world.<sup>67</sup> Eusebius tells us that through the *Logos* the emperor partakes of divine authority: “The emperor, receiving from the *Logos* of God a transcript of the Divine Sovereignty, in imitation of God himself, directs the administration of the world’s affairs” (*Laus Constantini* 1.6). The emperor’s authority results from his imitation of the *Logos*. This becomes manifest in the emperor’s behaviour; someone who declares allegiance to God is not led by the passions, but by virtues, conforming with the divine model (*Laus Constantini* 5.2–3). Constantine is depicted as the ideal emperor, the measure for past and future ones.

Although Athenagoras had already compared Marcus Aurelius and Commodus to God the Father and his Son, Eusebius is innovative in explicitly presenting Constantine, as God’s elect, as the first Christian Emperor. Yet Eusebius also conforms to the tendency of the dualism of norms discussed above. In his worldview, the emperor is responsible for the unity and stability of society, while God is responsible for the entire world. We have, again, two causes of stability, order, and values: an earthly one, the emperor; and a heavenly one, God. Furthermore, we have a specific relation between the two: the former is dependent on the latter.

So far we have seen variations of one Christian model, according to which Christian intellectuals accept and largely approve of the current political establishment

and the political norms of their society, despite their pagan character. Although Christians disagree with each other on whether they constitute a distinct group, they are nonetheless unanimous in their political integration in pagan society and in their approval of the authority of the Roman emperor and of the political norms of pagan society, such as the laws. They justify that approval by claiming that the Roman emperor is appointed by God. By making this claim, the Christians distinguish two sources of normativity – one earthly and political (the emperor), and one heavenly and moral (the Christian God) – and they further stress the derivative character of the former and the supremacy of the latter.

The alternative model to the one just presented is to make Christianity the decisive criterion for political order and justice in society. This is what Lactantius does in his *De Ira Dei*.<sup>68</sup> The main aim of this work is to argue against the widespread idea among pagan philosophers that anger is not compatible with divinity. Lactantius argues instead that God can exhibit anger when confronted with evil and that this is indeed the appropriate divine response to evil. He further argues that religion is crucial for the existence of society, since society is primarily characterized by order and justice, because, he claims, religion is crucial for avoiding the selfish actions that lead to crimes, as it instils a fear of God in people (*De Ira Dei* 8.5–8). Without God and religion, he claims, there is no fear of the consequences of unjust actions, and without fear there cannot be virtue or honesty. In the view of Lactantius, the Epicureans, for instance, destroy society when they argue against the fear of Gods. The following passage captures Lactantius' main point well:

And if God does not have anything to do with the world nor does he show any concern, why then should we not commit crimes as often as it shall be in our power to escape the notice of men and to cheat the public laws? Wherever we shall obtain an opportunity of escaping notice, let us take advantage of the occasion: let us take away the property of others, either without bloodshed or even with blood, if there is nothing else besides the laws to be revered. While Epicurus entertains these sentiments, he altogether destroys religion; and when this is taken away, confusion and disorder of life follow. But if religion cannot be taken away without destroying our hold of wisdom, by which we are separated from the brutes, and of justice, by which the public life may be more secure, how can religion itself be maintained or guarded without fear? For that which is not feared, is despised, and that which is despised, is plainly not venerated. Thus it comes to pass that religion and majesty and honour exist together with fear; but there is no fear where no one is angry. Whether, therefore, you take away from God kindness, or anger, or both, religion must be taken away, without which the life of men is full of folly, of wickedness, and enormity.

(*De Ira Dei* 8.5–8)

The pivotal move that Lactantius makes in this passage is to very closely connect political and ethical norms in such a way that both have the same source: public

laws specify moral duties for citizens and these have God as their source. Without God and without religion there is confusion and disorder in public life, he suggests. Unlike earlier Christian thinkers, on Lactantius' model we cannot, strictly speaking, have a society unless there exists a correct form of religion in that society, namely the Christian one. This is because for Lactantius religion is not only a personal matter, a personal conviction, but it has an important social and political role and functions as a political institution; religion is the source of normativity and sets public life in order.

Lactantius' emphasis on the political role of religion should not surprise us. Roman religion once occupied such a role in Roman society. Indeed, one of the charges brought by Romans against the Christians was that the latter did not appreciate the political character of Roman religion when they rejected it as incompatible with Christianity. For Lactantius religion is primarily the acknowledgement of the Christian God, who is the cause of order in the world as well as the source of ethical and political norms. The denial of religion in this sense leads to anarchy, injustice, and disorder. This becomes clear in passages where Lactantius argues that God is the source of justice; Christ, he says, is *doctor iustitiae* and *quasi viva lex* (*Div. Inst.* IV.23–24, IV.29). Accordingly, Lactantius speaks of a divine law that brings about justice, as other early Christian thinkers do, such as, for instance, Theophilus (*Ad Autol.* 35.1). The following passage from *De Ira Dei* is important in this regard:

Since, therefore, God has laid down a most holy law and wishes all men to be innocent and beneficent, is it possible that he should not be angry when he sees that his law is despised, that virtue is rejected and pleasure is made the object of pursuit? But if God is the governor of the world, as he must be, he surely does not despise that which is even of the greatest importance in the whole world.

(*De Ira Dei* 19.5–6)

The passage makes clear that Lactantius does not distinguish two realms, a political and an ethical, an earthly and a heavenly one, as earlier Christian thinkers did, but rather conflates the two. He suggests that the kingdom of God reaches down to earth and should shape our social and political norms and values. God, then, is not only the principle of world order but also the principle of social and political order, that is, the source of justice in human society. Apparently, for Lactantius justice cannot be achieved in a society by simply abiding by the laws of the state, for they can be unjust, as Tertullian had already pointed out. Suppose someone takes his neighbour's property without violating any law. No crime has been committed in a legal sense, but an unjust deed has been done. Both Plato and Cicero are sensitive to such actions and discuss them in order to show what justice really is.<sup>69</sup> For them justice is clearly not a matter of abiding by the laws but of doing what reason commands as just; and this requires the right psychological constitution, which includes the right motivation and the right views. Quite noticeably, Lactantius



invokes Cicero's argument in *De Republica* to the effect that the law is one and immutable, arising from right reason and conforming with nature, and the inventor of that law is God.<sup>70</sup> The important point that Lactantius makes is that civic laws as such do not bring about justice, but rather the right principles do; it is the conformity with these principles that confers authority to a law, a view reminiscent of Tertullian's relevant position discussed earlier.

For Lactantius the principles of just action crucially involve piety (*pietas*). This is nothing more than man's acknowledgement of the Christian God as the father of humans, of the *genus humanum*.<sup>71</sup> Unlike Tertullian, in whose view God is our father and nature our mother, Lactantius insists that God is both our father and mother (*Div. Inst.* IV.4.6). Man's acknowledgement of God as his only parent involves the acceptance of God as the source of order and justice. One may here wonder how exactly God is a source of justice. Lactantius, as far as I can see, does not give us a straightforward answer to this question. Yet he suggests that God is the source of right reason (*Div. Inst.* VI.8.6) and also of our social instinct (*Div. Inst.* VI.10.10). Lactantius appears to suggest that God is the creator of our nature and all its features. These are not neutral features of humankind but bearers of norms and values; they make us social animals and they incline us to justice – in short, they make us what we are: humans. Lactantius then castigates the denial of religion, that is, of the Christian God, as the source of injustice, confusion, and ethical and political disorder, for the reason that such a denial makes us blind to the normative features of our nature, which is crafted by God.

So far we have seen two early Christian models. In the first, Christians approve of the existing, non-Christian, political norms and institutions which account for order and justice in the state and accept the Roman emperor as the source of political norms. In the second model, which we find in the work of Lactantius, political order and justice cannot be achieved by abiding by the existing laws of the state but by being motivated by the right kind of religion, namely Christianity, that is, by the acceptance of the Christian God. On this view, the existing human political norms must be replaced by Christian ones. Yet there is another possibility, namely that norms are derived from nature, more specifically, from human nature. As Lactantius claims, God is the creator of human nature, but this does not mean that he is the creator of the norms pertaining to it. This is what Gregory of Nyssa will emphasize.

### Human and divine laws: the question of slavery

As we have seen here, and in the previous chapter, Christian philosophers insisted on the equality of all humans. Their belief was grounded in the view that all humans share the same nature, one created in the likeness of God, as specified in Genesis 1:26. We have seen that this point was vehemently defended against the views of the Gnostics, such as those held by Valentinus and Basilides, who insisted on the privileged character of a certain class of people on the basis of scriptural evidence such as Paul's statement in the Letter to the Romans 9:18–21, according

to which God made people different from one another. Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement, as well as Origen, vindicated in different ways the universal character of human nature, stressing that it crucially involves the ability to choose freely, an ability that we all share to the same degree. Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa defended quite strongly the idea that all humans share a common nature, no matter what their religious convictions or cultural backgrounds may be. Basil and Gregory put quite some emphasis on the nature that all humans share, as opposed to the properties that distinguish individual humans. This emphasis is the result of their theological argument (discussed in Chapter 2, pp. 93–95) that the persons of the divine Trinity share a common nature, namely the divine one, and yet they have distinct individual features.

Gregory speaks at length about universal human nature in his *On the Creation of Man* (178D–185D) and his *Letter to Ablabius*. Gregory argues that all humans share in God's image, which means that we all have an equal share in intellect; and this share in intellect crucially involves the ability to be masters of ourselves and to choose freely (*to autokrates kai auteuxousion*, 185AC). This view is the basis on which Gregory argues quite strongly against slavery, maintaining that no man is a slave by nature, a view already defended by the Stoics (D.L.VII.121–2).<sup>72</sup>

Early Christians take a somewhat ambiguous position on the question of slavery.<sup>73</sup> Justin, for instance, maintained that all humans, free and slaves alike, are equally sons of God and have the same value,<sup>74</sup> a view that we find repeated in several passages of Clement (*Paed.* 1.6.31, *Strom.* V.5.30.4), a view that is in line with Paul's statement that there is neither slave nor free, neither woman nor man in Christ (Gal. 3:28).<sup>75</sup> Paul's statement is remarkable in that it contradicts Aristotle's theory that Greeks are superior to non-Greeks, free citizens are superior to slaves and men superior to women as well as the Jewish dichotomy of humans into Jews and non-Jews. Such statements, however, do not explicitly condemn the idea of slavery let alone support its abolition. Indeed, some Christians, like Gregory of Nazianzus, claimed that slavery and freedom were the result of human deeds, of sinful or praiseworthy deeds (*De pauperum amore*, PG 35, 892AB). Later, Augustine would portray slavery as a consequence of the sins of the enslaved individuals (*De civitate Dei* 19.5).<sup>76</sup>

The first Christian condemnation of the idea of slavery as natural is found in the work of Basil and later in the work of Gregory of Nyssa. Basil explicitly claims that slavery is not a natural state for humans, arguing that there are not distinct natures for masters and servants, that all humans share a common human nature (*De spirito sancto* PG 32, 160D–161D). Basil, however, does admit that some people have a less developed capacity to deliberate (*bouleutikon*) and he suggests that it is to their advantage to be guided by others (161A).<sup>77</sup>

Gregory of Nyssa takes a much more outspoken position on the issue of slavery, taking Paul's statement in Galatians 3.28 as a basis.<sup>78</sup> Gregory argues that there is only one human nature shared by all people and it has been created in the likeness of God's nature. Freedom, he says, is an essential feature both of divine and human nature and, if freedom is an essential feature of humans, it cannot be taken

away. Those who divide humans into masters and slaves introduce a division that is not intended by God, thus going against God's law (*antinomothetein*; *Homily on Ecclesiastes* 335.5–7).

“I owned slaves, males and females.” What do you say? Do you sentence man, whose nature is free and with the power to decide, and to legislate against God, overriding his law (*antinomothetein*), which is imposed in nature? . . . So then, tell me, who will sell and who will buy him who is made in the likeness of God and lord of all the earth, and who has inherited from God authority over all that exists on earth? Only God can do so, or better, not even God himself. For it is written that his gifts are irrevocable. God would not enslave human nature, he who by his own choice brought us back to freedom from the slavery of sin. If God does not enslave free nature, who is this who sets his own power over that of God?

(*Homily on Ecclesiastes* IV,  
GNO V, 335.5–7, 336.10–20)

Striking here is the use of the verb *antinomothetein*, which might be taken to suggest the existence of divine legislation. Gregory does not of course refer to a specific, codified legislation; rather, God's laws are implied in the way that human nature has been created, namely in the image of God. This means that human nature entails certain norms. And these norms are as universal as human nature is. The division of humans in different categories, such as free and slaves, or the categories suggested by the Gnostics, is absurd; for God made all humans equal. The freedom to choose is granted to humans by God and can be taken away even by God himself. As Lactantius had already implied, it is not a neutral fact that humans are made in a certain way; rather, human nature, as a creation of God, has a normative character, that is, it dictates how we should treat ourselves and others, and what kind of behaviour towards others and ourselves cannot be tolerated. The careful study of human nature can show us what our duties towards ourselves and others are.

We find the same point of view in Nemesius' *De natura hominis*, which is dated to around the same time as Gregory's *De hominis opificio*. It is notable that Nemesius also criticizes those who legislate against God (*antinomothetein*; *De nat. hom.* 42, 144–147) and abide by human laws instead.<sup>79</sup> In his treatise Nemesius focuses on human nature and, like Gregory, underlines its normative character, which mainly consists in man's freedom to choose. Human law, he suggests, should not conflict with a law of nature, which has God as its author.

Gregory and Nemesius clearly state that the ultimate source of norms is God, yet norms are grounded specifically in human nature, which is created by God. Civic laws carry a normative force when they respect human nature; when they conflict with it, they conflict with divine legislation as well. To the extent that divine laws are revealed in human nature, there is nothing abstract or mysterious about them; rather, they are universal as well as specific and concrete.

The whole debate enters a new stage with Augustine, who in his *City of God* distinguishes two cities or societies: the heavenly one, which is purely Christian; and the earthly one, which is only partially Christian. Augustine also distinguishes between divine and human law. The former is immutable, universal, and eternal, whereas the latter is at best modelled on the former but remains an image of its model, thus having the opposite features: it is mutable, fallible, temporal. The eternal law is not meant only for heaven, for an otherworldly society, but it is the law of God, the supreme reason, which, as Augustine says, also orders human life, and is in this sense a law of nature, the law engraved in our hearts (*De libero arbitrio* I.6.15), the law by which we judge the actions of others. Augustine's project is both innovative and a highly sophisticated political program of a specifically Christian nature.

## Conclusion

We have seen that early Christians are much engaged with ethics, given the strong focus on ethics in Scripture. By making ethics central in their philosophical enquiries, Christians conform to a widespread tendency in pagan philosophy that recognizes ethics as the end of philosophy. Early Christians share with pagan philosophers several ideas, such as the theological-metaphysical orientation of ethics, namely the relation of humans to the world and God. They also share a distinct interest in salvation, and not just in happiness, as was the case in earlier philosophy. Early Christians, however, also differ from their pagan contemporaries in many respects, which I tried to point out in this chapter. Salvation is not merely the human final end, but creation was made in accordance with a salvation plan that God wants to realize. Yet for Christians salvation is not something we are left to achieve by ourselves; God is there to help us attain that aim. This is indicative of God's love, which we humans need to imitate and extend love to our neighbour. These ideas, I suggested, are distinct ideas that early Christian thinkers developed.

## Notes

- 1 For a good survey of New Testament ethics, see Osborn (1976: 15–49). The ethics of Paul's Letter to the Romans is discussed well by Thorsteinsson (2010: 89–104).
- 2 On the reception of this precept in early Christianity and its different interpretations, see Steenbuch (2018).
- 3 God's love, which is highlighted already in one of the earliest Christian writings, the *Letter to Diognetus* (ch. 9, 10).
- 4 For a discussion, see Jacobsen (2012: 145–157). On love in New Testament, see Osborne (1994: ch. 2).
- 5 See LS section 25E–G.
- 6 This has been well emphasized, perhaps overemphasized, by Hadot (1995). Philosophy becomes an art of living with Stoicism and Epicureanism and is stressed by Cicero, e.g. *Tusc. Disp.* II.11, II.12, V.5; *De fin.* III.4, V.16.
- 7 See also Cicero, *Acad.* I.34, 38, II.131; *De fin.* V.13; and Karamanolis (2006: 51–64).
- 8 See, e.g., Plutarch, *Adversus Colotem* 1107E; *Non posse suaviter vivi* 1086C–D; Plotinus, *Enn.* I.2.

- 9 Plutarch, *An recte dictum sit latenter esse videndum* 1129F–1130E; Plotinus, *Enn.* I.4.1–3. On Plutarch's ethics, see Van Hoof (2012) and Karamanolis (2013b). There is a fast-growing literature on Plotinus' ethics. See especially Song (2009).
- 10 Anscombe (1958: 1–19).
- 11 Thorsteinsson (2010). See also the papers in Rasimus et al. (2010). Ramelli (2020: 292–297) reviews this discussion.
- 12 Origen, for instance, expresses his respect for the ethics of the Stoic Musonius (*C. Cels.* III.66) and of Epictetus (VI.2), and Tertullian calls Seneca *Seneca saepe noster* (*De an.* 20). I owe the references to Thorsteinsson (2010: 1).
- 13 For a discussion of this topic, see Carone (2005a).
- 14 Plutarch, *De sera* 550D–E; *De facie* 944A; Alcinous, *Didask.* 28, Plotinus, *Enn.* I.4.3.33–40, I.2.7.6–13; Porphyry, *On Abstinence* III.26.29–3.27.1, III.27.8–9.
- 15 Classic on this topic is Merki (1952). The relevant texts have been recently collected and discussed by Männlein-Robert (2020).
- 16 As we saw in Chapters 2 and 3 (p. 95, p. 121), Gregory of Nyssa in particular would stress this point.
- 17 See also Clement, *Strom.* VII.7.48.1–2; Origen, *In Gen.* I.12.
- 18 *Si consideret aliquis universam mundi administrationem, intellegit pro-fecto quam vera sit sententia Stoicorum, qui aiunt nostra causa mundum esse constructum. Omnia enim quibus constat quaeque generat ex se mundus, ad utilitatem hominis accomodata sunt* (*De ira Dei* 13.1). It is on these grounds that Lactantius criticizes Epicurean cosmology in *De opificio Dei* 6.
- 19 [*R*]ecapitulare, id est ad initium redigere vel ab initio recensere (*Adv. Marc.* 17.1). See further Osborn (1997: 16–18, 39–41).
- 20 On this idea, see Osborn (1993: 142–172).
- 21 This line of thought is found in many Christian thinkers. See especially Clement, *Strom.* VII.22–34, and the discussion in Karamanolis (2012).
- 22 For a discussion of this passage, see Perrone (2020: 224–225).
- 23 *In Joh.* II.2.17, *C. Cels.* IV.59. See further Perrone (2020), who collects the relevant passages and studies Origen's vocabulary of deification (θεοποιῶ, ἐκθεόω, ἀποθεωθῆναι).
- 24 For a discussion of this passage, see Song (2009: 20–21).
- 25 Θερραπειᾶ . . . τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ συνεχῆς ἐπιμέλεια τῆς ψυχῆς (*Strom.* VII.1.3.1). The term *epimeleia* is an allusion to the Socratic command to take care of our soul in the *Apology* 30ab. See Karamanolis (2020: 117).
- 26 *Legatio* 12.1–25, referring to Plato, *Gorgias* 523c–524a, *Apology* 41a; cf. *Legatio* 31.15–31, 32.8–27.
- 27 See Clement *Strom.* II.2.4–6 and the discussion in Havrda (2019).
- 28 On this point, see Edwards (2003: 247–248).
- 29 Porphyry *Sent.* 8, 9, *Ad Marcellam* 34; cf. Porphyry, *Philosophy from Oracles*, fr. 323 Smith, at *PE.* IX.10.1–2; also fr. 324; *PE.* IX.10.3–5.
- 30 See further Karamanolis (2013c: 617–618).
- 31 See the interesting presentation of Anderson (2009), who traces the origin of sin back to the Old Testament.
- 32 I am indebted to Johannes Steenbuch for stressing this point.
- 33 On the history of this distinction, see Marksches (1998).
- 34 See, for instance, *Commentary on the Song of Songs* prol. 1.4, 2.4–8.
- 35 Plotinus, *Enn.* I.2.1, I.4.16, VI.7.5.11–17, on which see more below; Porphyry, *On Knowing Yourself* fr. 274–275 Smith; *On Abstinence* I.24.4, I.30.6–7.
- 36 τὸ κατ' εἰκόνα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν τῷ καθ' ἡμᾶς λεγομένῳ ἔσω ἀνθρώπῳ (*C. Cels.* VI.63); cf. VII.38, *Princ.* I.1.9, *Commentary on the Song of Songs* prol. 1.4, 2.4–8., 11–14.
- 37 Basil, *In illud attende tibi ipsi*, PG 31, 197–217; Gregory of Nazianus *Letter* 153; Gregory, *De hom. opif.* 236A.
- 38 See mainly Plotinus, *Enn.* I.2.2–3, 6; Porphyry, *Sententiae* 32; Iamblichus in Olympiodorus, *In Phaedonem* 113.14–114.25. On the hierarchy of virtues in Plotinus, see Dillon (1996b).
- 39 For a discussion and further references, see Lilla (1971: 103–104), Clark (1977), Havrda (2019), Edwards (2019: 44–46). See also Gregory of Nyssa, who similarly takes the view that

- virtue lies in the mean, for instance in the text cited below: Δόγμα δὲ ἐστὶν οὗτος ὁ λόγος ἐν μεσότητι θεωρεῖσθαι τὰς ἀρετὰς ὀριζόμενος, διότι πέφυκε πᾶσα κακία ἢ κατ' ἔλλειψιν ἢ κατ' ὑπέρπρωσιν ἀρετῆς ἐνεργεῖσθαι, οἷον ἐπὶ τῆς ἀνδρείας ἔλλειψίς τις ἐστὶν ἀρετῆς ἢ δειλία, ὑπέρπρωσις δὲ τὸ θράσος. τὸ δὲ ἐκατέρου τούτων καθαρεῖον ἐν μέσῳ τε τῶν παρακειμένων κακιῶν θεωρεῖται καὶ ἀρετὴ ἐστὶ (Our doctrine is this account that defines virtues as being in the mean, because vice is of such nature that comes into being either by lacking or by exceeding virtue, as is the case with bravery for instance, in which cowardice is lack of virtue and arrogance is excess. What remains away from both ends and lies in the middle of the adjacent vices is deemed to be and is virtue; *Vita Moses* 420A).
- 40 There is a considerable amount of literature on Clement's ethics. These include Bradley (1974: 41–66); Osborn (1976: 50–83); Greschat (1989: 121–133).
- 41 See Havrda (2020).
- 42 *Strom.* VI.7.60.1–3; cf. IV.18.113.6–114.1, VII.14.84.1–2, VII.14.88.3.
- 43 Clement speaks of the φιλοθεάμων ψυχὴ and he refers us to Plato with approval (*Strom.* V.4.19.3–20.1). For more references and discussion, see Havrda (2020).
- 44 See Knuutila (2004: 118–121).
- 45 I owe the reference to Steenbuch (2018: 12).
- 46 *Adv. Marc.* IV.16; *Strom.* II.22.139.1–2. I owe the references to Steenbuch (2018).
- 47 Clement describes love as στερκτική οικείωσις (*Strom.* VI.9.73.3, II.18.87.2). See Steenbuch (2018: 19). On God's love in Origen, see Osborne (1994: ch. 7).
- 48 On Montanism, see Markschie (2012) and Fox (1986: 404–410). On God's love in Origen, see Osborne (1994: ch. 7).
- 49 Tertullian's ethics is further discussed by Osborn (1997: 225–245).
- 50 See Koch (1932: 41–46). Cf. Ramelli (2013: 223–278).
- 51 This has been shown beyond doubt by Ramelli (2013: 279–658).
- 52 For an extensive and detailed discussion of the Christian theory of *apokatastasis* and its pagan background, see the detailed and rich study of Ramelli (2013).
- 53 Paul's ethics and his conception of law is the subject of numerous studies. See briefly Osborn (1996: 43–46) and Thorsteinsson (2010).
- 54 See Wilken (1984); Fox (1986: 422–434). In this section I draw on Karamanolis (2021a).
- 55 It is possible that Athenagoras delivered his apology to the emperors when they were in Athens. His plea for the Christians has a political motivation, given the outbreak of persecution against the Christians by Marcus Aurelius, and the martyrdoms of Lyons in 177 (Eusebius, *H.E.* V.1.1.–4.3). See further Barnes (1975). On Athenagoras' *Legatio*, see further below pp. 217–218.
- 56 Paul takes Scripture as a source of norms and the life of Christ as a model of life; see Gal. 4:30, 1 Cor. 9:10, Rom. 15.1–3, Phil. 2:1–13. It has been argued that Paul accepted some pagan virtues; see Rosner (2003: 212–226).
- 57 For a discussion of some of these issues, see Fox (1986), 14–47.
- 58 See 1 *Apol.* 2.1, 6–7, 3.9, 12.19–20.
- 59 On Tertullian's political views, see Barnes (1971).
- 60 For a commentary on this chapter, see Waltzing (1961: 211–215). Sider (2001: 1–70) has (partly) translated and commented on the *Apologeticum*.
- 61 See Sherwin-White (1963) and Barnes (1968).
- 62 Barnes (1971: 143–163), with reference to the relevant evidence. Several such decrees were issued at the time of Diocletian's persecution. See Shin (2018).
- 63 See de Ste Croix (1963), Barnes (1971: 146).
- 64 See Waltzing (1961: 246–254).
- 65 See Tertullian, *De an.* 11.1–3, 22.2 and the discussion in Chapter 4 pp. 176–181.
- 66 οὐ γὰρ ἀπαρκεῖ δίκαιον εἶναι (ἐστὶ δὲ δικαιοσύνη ἴσα ἴσοις ἀμείβειν), ἀλλ' ἀγαθοῖς καὶ ἀνεξικάκοις εἶναι πρόκειται (For it is not enough to be just [justice is to return measure for measure]; but it is required of us to be good and forbearing; *Legatio* 34.3).
- 67 Eusebius' *Panegyric* has been translated and discussed by Maraval (2001). Eusebius' presentation of Constantine has been much discussed. For a succinct account, see Cameron and Hall (1999: 34–48).

- 68 Lactantius' place in the climate of a changing empire is discussed by Digeser (2000).
- 69 See *Republic* I–II, *De fin.* II.58–60.
- 70 *Div. Inst.* VI.8.6–9, citing Cicero, *De Respublica* III.33. For a discussion of the passage, see Colot (2016: 145–147).
- 71 *Pietas . . . nihil aliud quam parentis agnitio* (*Div. Inst.* III.9.19). See Colot (2016: 150–152).
- 72 Aristotle claimed that slavery is natural for some people (*Politics* 1253b4–1254a17).
- 73 On the attitude of Christians towards slavery, see Ramelli (2012a, more thoroughly 2016).
- 74 πάντες υἱοὶ καὶ ὁμότιμοι γεγόνασι (all humans are sons [i.e. of God] and of the same value) (*Dial.* 134) Cf. 2 *Apol.* 1, where Justin claims that all men are brothers.
- 75 οὐκ ἔνι Ἰουδαίῳ οὐδὲ Ἕλληγι, οὐκ ἔνι δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος, οὐκ ἔνι ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ, πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἰς ἔστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (*Gal.* 3:28). There is much literature on this passage. It is reviewed and discussed by Ramelli (2020).
- 76 See Garnsey (1996: 243–244).
- 77 One can reasonably speculate that Basil is guided here by Aristotle's ideas in the *Politics*, esp. 1254a20–24.
- 78 On Gregory's attitude to slavery, see Ramelli (2016: ch. 5).
- 79 Πῶς γὰρ οὐ φευκτός ἐστιν ἄνθρωπος ἀντινομοθετῶν τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἀντιπαρακελυόμενος τοῖς τῆς προνοίας ἔργοις, ὁ μὴδὲ ταῖς ἀνθρωπίναις νομοθεσίαις ἀντιλέγειν τολμῶν (For how is a man not to be shunned when he makes laws contrary to God and instructs against the works of providence but does not even dare to speak against human law-making? *De nat. hom.*, Sharples and Van der Eijk trans.).

# 7

## CONCLUSION

In the Introduction, I set out the aim of this book: not merely to survey the views of early Christians on some key philosophical issues but also to show that early Christians engage with philosophical questions similar to those addressed by their pagan contemporaries, and that they do so using similar methods, which include various kinds of philosophical argument. I do not want to deny, of course, that Christians were relying on Scripture, or even that they were relying primarily on Scripture. The evidence I have discussed shows that Scripture played an essential role in the formation of early Christian thinking, yet at the same time this evidence also shows that Scripture alone did not help Christians much in developing views about complex philosophical questions, which they could not avoid if they wanted to spell out and properly defend the message of Christianity. Their emphasis on the authority and the truthfulness of Scripture should not obscure the fact that the tools they used to articulate their views on philosophical issues, such as the nature of matter, the question of free will, or the soul–body relation, were argument, logical analysis, and exegesis, not the authority of Scripture. As we have seen, biblical stories such as God’s hardening of Pharaoh’s heart (Exodus 4:23) or Paul’s statement that he observes a law at work in his members unlike the one in his mind (Romans 7:19–24) were a battlefield of interpretation among early Christians. It takes exegetical and philosophical diligence to articulate a convincing and credible interpretation of such passages and even more diligence to fit such an interpretation to a coherent, plausible, philosophical thesis.

I have suggested that, in this respect, Christian thinkers resemble their contemporary Platonists. Platonists also stress the importance, authority, and even the perfection of Plato. In the end, however, this is of little help to them in figuring out how, for instance, the soul relates to the body or why wickedness exists in the world. The similarity between Christians and Platonists goes further. Both sides are marked by internal strife, dissension, and even conflict. As I have often stressed



in this book, this is an essential feature of early Christianity, which shows that Scripture on its own did not solve any issue, just as Plato's texts as such did not. Disagreement was not only about the interpretation of Scripture; it was also about what it would make sense to read in Scripture. Origen does not claim that his sophisticated theory of human free will comes from Scripture, nor does Gregory of Nyssa make a similar claim about his view on matter and cosmogony or the unity of the Trinity. Both, however, developed such theories in the belief that it would make sense for a Christian to think that way. The truth they were attributing to Scripture was a presumed quality they sought to attain by means of their philosophical theories, not a given one. In this sense early Christians again resemble their Platonist contemporaries, who were trying to devise a theory that would be worthy of Plato, that is, a theory that would do justice to both Plato's texts and thought and outshine all other competing philosophical theories.

The development of philosophical views and theories gave Christianity persuasive power. This is often underestimated by historians of late antiquity, who tend to highlight the social and political dimension of Christianity. Students of ancient philosophy, on the other hand, do not always appreciate the fact that early Christian thinkers are no less philosophical than contemporary pagan philosophers. A close look at their texts has shown, I hope, that they are not only capable of articulating highly sophisticated philosophical views and formulating eloquent objections to rival views, but that some are also capable of developing a certain philosophical system in which they address all major philosophical questions in a coherent manner. It seems to me that Origen and Gregory of Nyssa fit into this category. What their texts also show is that the intellectual paradigm for many of these early Christian thinkers is that of pagan philosophy, and their criticism of pagan philosophy does not always amount to rejection but reveals emulation, appreciation, and engagement. The fact that early Christian thinkers set themselves so profoundly in dialogue, albeit critically, with pagan philosophers corroborates that conclusion.

We have encountered many instances of such dialogue in this book. Plato, Epictetus, Galen, Plotinus, and Porphyry recur as dialogue partners of early Christian philosophers. But this dialogue can be interpreted in different ways. There are two possible interpretations that should be avoided. One stresses the similarities between Christian and pagan thinkers, the other stresses their differences. Both seem equally problematic to me. It is true that Origen's theory of free will draws on the Stoic theory to the extent that it can be used as testimony for it, and the case with Tertullian's theory of the soul is similar, which is again close to the relevant Stoic doctrine – or Gregory's views on matter, which were largely inspired by Porphyry's. The Christians, however, make different use of the theories they draw on. It is not only that they put them to different use; as I have tried to show in this book, but they also link them with Christian views that are completely alien to the original pagan theories. Origen, for instance, takes up the Stoic notion of pre-passions, but he sets out to apply it to Christ in order to explain the impassibility of his divine nature. The final result is a distinct philosophical picture.

Again, there might be disagreement on what this picture amounts to. One tendency is to conceive of it as an appropriation and recasting of pagan philosophical material. This seems to me to be misguided. As I have tried to show, Christian thinkers were concerned with developing Christian philosophical views and some of them were concerned with creating a new philosophical outlook. Origen and Gregory of Nyssa once again come to mind as systematic Christian thinkers, while Justin, Theophilus, and Tertullian do not quite reach that level. As we have seen, however, the latter set of thinkers were also capable of developing personal positions on philosophical matters and of arguing rigorously against rival views. Furthermore, they inherited the philosophical questions which troubled their predecessors, studied their views, and set themselves the task of developing them and coming up with better answers. Their quality and plausibility needs, of course, to be evaluated, but first they must be appreciated as thinkers with philosophical sensitivity and ability.

The other tendency is to conceive of early Christian thought as a special case, different from ancient pagan philosophical thinking. I have tried to show that this view is equally misguided. I cannot think of one philosophical topic that early Christian thinkers do not treat in ways similar to that of their pagan contemporaries. As we have seen, they argue, for example, about the nature of the soul and its relation to the body much like Hellenic philosophers do. Basil and Gregory operate with conceptual tools similar to those employed by Plotinus and Porphyry when they set out to expound cosmogony and even the unity of the persons of the Trinity. Even when they speak of the resurrection of the body, the nature of the Trinity, or the incarnation, they set out to give arguments that have parallels in the Hellenic philosophical tradition.

Of course, one would be justified in claiming that such issues were peculiar to Christianity. The nature of the Trinity and of Christ, given his incarnation, the resurrection of the body, and other issues, were new topics which generated lengthy debates in Christianity. Yet these issues were occasions for a renaissance of philosophy. The Cappadocian conceptualization of the distinction between *hypostasis* and *ousia* is a good example of a new and important metaphysical theory with highly interesting ramifications. Christian thinkers were confronted with a new philosophical problem, namely how the three divine persons of the Trinity make up a unity, and came up with original and sophisticated philosophical theories. These are interesting not only in view of the question they set out to answer but more generally to the extent that they address a specific metaphysical relation, that between an individual and its genus.

The view that the engagement with theoretical issues peculiar to Christianity amounts to theology and not to philosophy is simply unfair. As I have tried to show, it is very difficult to distinguish theology from philosophy in antiquity, especially in late antiquity. Late Platonists founded their entire philosophy on what they took to be the first principles of reality, which make up the subject of theology because these principles are assumed to be divine. Platonists are not alone in their predilection for theology. The Peripatetic author of *De mundo*, who sets out

to present the cause accounting for the harmony, unity, and order of the world, claims that he sets out to do theology because these features are accounted for by a ruling, dominant, and providential God. Apuleius takes up this idea and recasts it again in his own work *De mundo*. Similarly, Galen holds that not only cosmic phenomena but also the parts of the human body point to a providential God (in *On the Usefulness of Parts*). Christian philosophers are similar in their preoccupation with theology. They want to explain Christ's nature, incarnation, and the Trinity because they want to explain an essential part of our reality; indeed, that part which in their view is crucial in explaining the world, human nature, and how humans can attain happiness and salvation.

Christians, then, both differ from and are similar to their pagan contemporaries. These differences are, in my view, such that Christians constitute a distinct school of thought, just as early Christian artists and writers initiated new developments in art and literature. Yet they were similar to contemporary pagan philosophers to the extent that they engaged in common philosophical disputes – they dealt with certain topics over and over again and conceptualized them in a distinct way.

One could still ask what the value of this philosophical school is from the point of view of the history of philosophy. Plato discovered the essences of things and is the father of dialectic; Aristotle developed essentialism, outlinedhylomorphism, and discovered formal logic; the Stoics discovered propositions and propositional logic and were the first to broach the subject of human free choice. What is the contribution of early Christian philosophers?

The distinction between *ousia* and *hypostasis* is one such contribution. It resembles, but is quite different from, the Platonic/Aristotelian distinction between universal and particular and the Stoic distinction between universal and proper (*idion*). An individual – Socrates or Christ, for instance – is both *ousia* and *hypostasis* (man and this man, divine and a divine person), and as such has both universal and particular properties: the properties of mankind or divinity and those of the individual person. Of course, the Neoplatonists, especially Plotinus and Porphyry, foreshadowed this distinction, but the Cappadocian contribution remains a valuable one. Gregory of Nyssa in particular gave more depth to this theory, stressing the unity of divine agency.

Another valuable contribution to philosophy is the close connection of cosmogony with theodicy. This is to be credited mainly to Origen. He was the first to realize that the argument from design was not sufficient to address the worry about the goodness and justice of the divine creator, which was advanced mainly by the Gnostics, who claimed humans, created in the image of God, were unequal in some significant respects. Origen comes up with a very imaginative and original theory (outlined in Chapters 4 and 5) that created a sensation and stirred reactions among his contemporary Christians. Christians made the (in my view) unfortunate choice to confine wickedness to the sphere of human activity and follow the Stoics in taking for granted that divine providence always arranges things for the good. But as with the Stoics, this is an understandable choice given their commitment to the view that God is good, benevolent, and just.

Finally, Christians take the important step of stressing the limits of the human ability to achieve happiness and attain salvation. Pagan philosophers almost without exception maintained that happiness was up to us, provided we build the right character and lead the right kind of life, a life of reflection and virtue. Christian philosophers from Clement on offer a differing view. They rather stress human limitations and instead suggest that all we can do is lead a life that can attract divine grace, which can bring us happiness. Attaining happiness still depends mostly on us, but it is clearly not exclusively our achievement, as was the case in the accounts of pagan philosophers from Plato to Plotinus. This is, of course, a debatable feature of Christian philosophy, but nevertheless an important and original one.

But, no matter how we assess the value of early Christian philosophy, it is a matter of fact that with them philosophy enters a new stage – it becomes Christian. Medieval philosophy in both East and West is Christian philosophy and as such inherits many of the insights, theories, and conceptual innovations of early Christian thinkers. Byzantine philosophers are greatly inspired by Origen and the Cappadocians, whom they study alongside Plato, Aristotle, and the Neoplatonists; as a result, they employ terminology and concepts from both pagan and Christian philosophers. At the very least, the period considered in this book deserves our attention because of the paradigm change in the history of philosophy.

# APPENDIX

## The protagonists

In the following I provide some basic biographical information about the main figures I discuss in the chapters of this book, in the hope that this will be helpful to the reader. The order is chronological.

### **Marcion (c. 85–160)**

Marcion was born in Sinope of Pontus and moved to Rome to become integrated in the local Christian community. In 144, he broke with the local Church and founded his own (Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* IV.5.3). Marcion distinguished between a higher God and an inferior God. The former is good, saviour, father of Christ, the true God; the latter is just, judge, powerful, but also irascible, maleficent, and potentially cruel (*Adv. Marc.* II.6.1, II.16.3, II.29.1). The former is the God of the Gospels, the latter the God of the Old Testament, which Marcion rejected as a source of Christian doctrine. The latter God reveals himself through the creation of the world, which is incomplete and faulty (*Adv. Marc.* I.14.1), and through the Law, with which men comply in order to avoid punishment, while the true God reveals himself through his Son, Christ (I.17.1, II.19.1). For Marcion, the way to salvation is through an ascetic life. He rejects marriage and procreation so that the created world will not be perpetuated. Marcion wrote a work entitled *Antithesis* (meaning, “Opposition”; *Adv. Marc.* I.19.4), but nothing has survived today, since he was declared heretical from early on. Hence all we know about him comes from his critics, such as Tertullian and Irenaeus.

### **Justin Martyr (c. 100–168)**

Justin, called “philosopher and martyr” by Tertullian (*Adv. Val.* 5.1), was born in Samaria in Palestine around 100 and he must have converted to Christianity around

132–135. Justin allegedly studied in the ancient philosophical schools of Stoicism, Aristotelianism, Pythagoreanism, and Platonism (*Dial.* 2.1–8.3), particularly enjoying the study of Plato (2 *Apol.* 12.1), before converting to Christianity, impressed by the courage of Christian martyrs (Eusebius *H.E.* IV.8.5). Justin founded a school in Rome during the reign of Antoninus Pius (138–161), and his students included Tatian and Irenaeus of Smyrna. Justin died as a martyr during a persecution at the time of Marcus Aurelius (c. 162–168), probably in 165. His works include two *Apologies*, which address the pagans; a work critical of heresies (1 *Apol.* 26.8, Tertullian, *Adv. Val.* V.1); a lecture on the soul, and a dialogue against the Jews (Eusebius *H.E.* IV. 18.1–6), of which the two *Apologies* and the *Dialogue with Trypho* (against the Jews) are extant. Justin exerted considerable influence on later Christian philosophers. Particularly influential was his doctrine of the Son of God as *Logos* and Wisdom of the Father.

### **Basilides (fl. 120–140)**

We know virtually nothing about the life and activities of Basilides beyond the fact that he lived in Alexandria at the time of the emperors Hadrian and Antoninus Pius. His views can be reconstructed from the critical reports of Clement, Irenaeus, and Hippolytus. Basilides apparently maintained that in the beginning there was an unborn Father, from whom was born *Nous*, and then from him was born the *Logos*; from the *Logos* comes the *Phronesis*; from *Phronesis*, *Sophia* and *Dynamis*; and from them the Virtues. Basilides distinguishes between the supreme God and the creator God, whom he identifies with the God of the Old Testament, who rules our world. Jesus is the messenger of the supreme God, who aims to lead the elect few to God. These privileged few had knowledge (*gnosis*) of God also before the advent of the Gospel. Basilides wrote a (no longer extant) work entitled *Exegetica* in 24 books, presumably a commentary on the Scriptures.

### **Valentinus (fl. 120–140)**

Born in Alexandria, Valentinus taught in Rome between the years 130 and 140, when he was excommunicated. A number of works discovered in Nag Hammadi library are thought to contain his teaching, among them *Gospel of Truth*, *Treatise on Resurrection*, and *Interpretation of Knowledge*. Valentinus apparently distinguished between God the Father, who is utterly transcendent, and God the creator, or the God of the Genesis, who is an illegitimate child of *Sophia*, one of the aeons created by God the Father. The creator God is an ignorant and arrogant God, responsible for the badness in the world and also for the ignorance of the humans of God the Father. The human ignorance of God the Father is amended with the sending of God's son, Christ, to the world, to reveal what God is and to bring humankind the knowledge that would save them. This knowledge or *gnosis*, though, is given only to the elect few, the *pneumatikoi* or spiritual, who are the only ones to be

saved. Valentinus died in Cyprus in 161. His views were strongly criticized by Irenaeus (*Adversus Haereses*) and Tertullian (*Ad Valentinianos*) and were also resisted by Origen.

### Tatian (c. 120–170)

Tatian was a pupil of Justin, whom he met in Rome (Eusebius, *Chronicle* XII, *H.E.* IV.29.1, 3), but we have his word that he was born in Assyria (*Or.* 42). Tatian tells us that he was a philosopher of some fame when he converted to Christianity (*Or.* 1.10). This happened when he travelled to Rome (29) and was attracted, he says, by the simplicity and intelligibility of Christian doctrines. Except for his *Oratio Ad Graecos*, one other work of his survives, the so-called *Diatessaron*, a harmonizing account of all four Gospels. Tatian's zeal guided him to defend a highly ascetic ideal (Tertullian, *De Ieiunio* 15), and he was known as the founder of the sect of Encratites (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I.28.1; Eusebius, *H.E.* IV.29).

### Irenaeus of Lyon (c. 130/140–202?)

Irenaeus was probably born in Smyrna, where he witnessed the martyrdom of the local bishop and his teacher, Polycarp (*Adv. Haer.* III.3.4). His knowledge of the Celtic language must be the reason why he was sent to Lyon in 177 as presbyter. That year the people of Lyon turned against local Christians, killing many of them, including the local bishop, in what it was one of the most ferocious local persecutions against the Christians. Irenaeus escaped to Rome and on his return to Lyon he was appointed bishop of the city. Irenaeus' main work is the *Against Heresies* (*Adversus Haereses*, in five books), written originally in Greek, of which only parts of the original survive, but we have the work in an ancient Latin translation, which is quite faithful to the original. The work sets out to criticize and correct the Gnostic teachings, especially those of Valentinus and Marcion. Another of his works, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, written probably after his *Against Heresies*, is available only in Armenian translation. Eusebius (*H.E.* V.20.1) credits Irenaeus with the writing of letters and a treatise, *On Scientific Knowledge*, which addresses the Greeks. Neither of them are extant today.

### Theophilus of Antioch (c. 150–220)

Theophilus lived at the second half of the second century and served as bishop of Antioch (Jerome, *Vitae* 25; Eusebius, *H.E.* III.22.1, IV.24.1). He is the author of *Against Marcion*, *Against the Heresy of Hermogenes*, *To Autolytus*, commentaries on the Bible (Jerome, *Vitae* 25) and a work *On History* (*Ad Autol.* II.30). Today only his treatise *To Autolytus* is extant. This work was finished shortly after the death of Marcus Aurelius (180), which is mentioned in the third book, and addresses an educated Greek, Autolytus, who was raising objections to Christianity. Theophilus is the first to speak of the Trinity in terms of God, his *Logos*, and his Wisdom (*Ad Autol.* II.15).

### Clement of Alexandria (c. 140/150–220)

Clement was born around 140/150, either in Alexandria, where he spent most of his life, or in Athens, as Epiphanius reports (*Panarion* 31.3). He studied with Pantaenus in Alexandria (Eusebius, *H.E.* 5.11; *Strom.* I.11.2), whom he probably succeeded as teacher of the local Christian school (*H.E.* 5.11). Clement left Alexandria in 202, presumably in order to avoid the persecution of Severus (*H.E.* VI.1), and he must have died around 220. Clement's most important works are the *Protrepticus*, the *Paedagogus*, and the *Stromata*. The first of them belongs to the genre of protreptic speeches aiming to show the foolishness of pagan religion and that Christianity is the fulfilment of the *Logos*. The *Paedagogus* outlines Christian education and Christian ethics. Also of ethical nature is the work *Quis dives salvetur* (*The Rich Man's Salvation*), an allegorical interpretation of Mark 10:17–31. Clement's *Stromata* (in eight books, surviving unfinished) belongs to the genre of *miscellanea*. In it, Clement aims to present the doctrines of the true Christian Gnostic, the Christian wise man, and to oppose those of Gnostics like Valentinus and Basilides (thus the work's second title, "Miscellanea: Gnostic Expositions According to True Philosophy").

### Tertullian (c. 160–225)

Tertullian was born in Carthage in a pagan family and was educated in rhetoric and law. In his *De pallio* (*On the Mantle*), he explains why he gave up the Roman toga to adopt the mantle of philosophy. It is unclear how he turned to Christianity. Tertullian was a prolific author and a skilled writer; the first Christian to write in Latin, as far as we know. Today 30 of his works are extant. One of his earliest ones is the *Apologeticum*, where he defends the reliability of Christians as citizens of the Roman imperium and attacks the pagan religion, which he also does in *De Idololatria*. In his maturity Tertullian sympathizes with the strict moralism of Montanists and writes a number of works on ethical matters in which he maintains chastity and an ascetic life (e.g. *De uxore*, *Decultu feminarum*, *De oratione*, *De paenitentia*). Tertullian was a skilled polemicist, especially against alternative Christian views, in works such as *Adversus Valentinianos*, *Adversus Marcionem*, *Adversus Praxean*, and *Adversus Hermogenem*. Tertullian played an important role in creating a Latin vocabulary for Christian theology, being the first to introduce such terms as *trinitas*.

### Origen (c. 185–254)

Origen's biography is amply documented by Eusebius (*H.E.* VI.1–39), by the *Apoloogy for Origen* that Eusebius wrote together with Pamphilus, and by the *Panegyric* of his student, Gregory Thaumaturgos. Origen must have been born around 185/186 in Alexandria (*H.E.* VII.1), but it is not certain whether his parents were Christian (*H.E.* VI.1) or not (Porphyry in *H.E.* VI.19). He studied in Alexandria with Ammonius, probably Ammonius Saccas (Porphyry in *H.E.* VI.19.1–10; Porphyry,



VP. 3.11, 20.36), the teacher of Plotinus. Subsequently Origen taught in Alexandria, but he moved to Caesarea after the massacre of Christians of 215, which was ordered by Caracalla. In Caesarea he established an apparently successful school. He was arrested in the persecution of Decius (c. 250), but later released, to die from the consequences of torture in 254 in Tyros. As a Christian intellectual Origen had three main concerns – exegetical, systematic, and apologetic – and his work can be divided accordingly. In the first category belong his several commentaries on books of the Old and the New Testament (*H.E.* VI.24, 32, 36) and the *Hexapla*, a work in which he compared the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, the Hebrew text in Greek characters, and the Greek translations of Aquila, Symmachus, the Septuagint, and of Theodotion in six parallel columns. Among his systematic works, of particular importance is the *On Principles* (surviving in the Latin translation of Rufinus). His apologetic works include the voluminous *Against Celsus*. Origen's views on the status of God were embraced by Eusebius and others, the so-called Origenists, but they also met with criticism from Methodius, Gregory of Nyssa, Epiphanius. They were defended by Eusebius and Pamphilus in the *Apology for Origen*. Origen remained enormously influential, despite the critical distance that later Christians take from him.

### **Arius (c. 256–336)**

Arius was a presbyter in Alexandria, where he must also have studied. He became famous for the view that God the Father is of different substance than the Son, namely uncreated, while the Son is created “out of nothing” by God the Father and is thus inferior to him. This view soon became very controversial and led to the first Council of Nicaea, where it was definitely condemned. From Arius' writings, only two letters are preserved – by Epiphanius and by Socrates Scholasticus – while from his main work, *Thalia* (meaning “Festivity”), which was written in verse, two fragments survive in works of his main opponent, Athanasius.

### **Lactantius (c. 260–325)**

Lactantius was born in Africa around 260 and acquired an education and training in rhetoric from Arnobius. At some point between 290 and 300, he was appointed by Diocletian as a teacher of rhetoric in Bithynia, and perhaps he converted to Christianity there. When the emperor launched the great persecution against the Christians in 303, Lactantius ceased to teach and started writing the works that are still extant today. These include the early *De opificio Dei* (*On God's Creation*) and the long *Divinae Institutiones* (*Divine Commands*), which is a systematic refutation of pagan religion and an exposition of the Christian doctrines. His *De ira Dei* (*On God's Anger*) sets out to establish, against a widespread pagan view, that God can exhibit anger when confronted with vice and wickedness. Finally, the *De mortibus persecutorum* (*On the Deaths of the Persecutors*), written after the end of the great persecution and after the deaths of the persecutors themselves (c. 320), sets out

to show how God's greatness punished his enemies, the persecuting emperors. Lactantius died in Trier in 325, where from 314/315 he taught Constantine's son, Crispus.

### **Eusebius (c. 263–339)**

Eusebius was born in Caesarea and spent most of his life there, becoming bishop of the city in around 313. He studied with Pamphilus, an admirer of Origen's work, and inherited his teacher's admiration for Origen. His respect for Origen's views led him to come close to Arius' subordinationist theology. Eusebius was a man of great learning, which becomes manifest in his works *Preparation for the Gospel* (*Preparatio Evangelica*) and *Demonstration of the Gospel* (*Demonstratio Evangelica*). The aim of these works is to discredit the Hellenic and Jewish cultures and theologies and their respective objections to Christianity and show that the latter represents the culmination of human wisdom and culture up to this point. Nevertheless, Eusebius quotes from a wide variety of Jewish and Hellenic sources, and he preserves fragments of otherwise little-known philosophers such as Atticus and Severus. Inspired by Origen's *Against Celsus*, Eusebius also wrote against the works critical of Christianity by Hierocles and Porphyry. He is also the first to write a *History of the Church* (*Historia Ecclesiastica*), to highlight the victory of Christianity under Constantine. Eusebius' praise for Constantine is expressed in his *Panegyric*, delivered by the author in 335, and in *Life of Constantine*, which is left unfinished.

### **Athanasius (c. 295–373)**

Athanasius became famous mainly for the articulation of the view concerning the relation between God the Father and God the Son, which prevailed in the Council of Nicaea against the theology of the Arians. He was defending the view that the Son is of the same substance as God the Father, an idea that he expressed using the term *homoousios* (consubstantial). Athanasius was elected bishop of Alexandria in 328, but was later exiled to Trier by the Emperor Constantine. He returned to his see after the amnesty of the Emperor Julian. Athanasius' most important theological works include *Against the Pagans*, *On the Incarnation of the Word* (the first to write a work with such a title), and three treatises *Against the Arians*. He is also the author of *Life of Anthony*, which was very influential in the rise of the genre of hagiography.

### **Basil of Caesarea (c. 300–379)**

Basil was born into an upper-class Cappadocian family. His father was a member of the so-called Hypsistarians, a sect spread throughout the Mediterranean venerating the highest God (*theos hypsistos*). Basil was educated in Caesarea, Constantinople, Antioch, and Athens by teachers of rhetoric such as Libanius, Prohaeresius and Himerius. Basil returned to Caesarea as teacher of rhetoric, and in 364 he became

bishop of the city and a man of influence and power in the region. His many writings include the *Homilies on the Six Days of Creation* (*Homilies in Hexaemeron*), the *Homilies on the Creation of Man*, his work *Against Eunomius*, and his short but acclaimed *To Young Men on the Value of Classical Literature*. The first two works show Basil's concern to argue for what he takes to be the correct Christian view on cosmogony. In *Against Eunomius*, Basil addresses Eunomius' recasting of Arius' position on the nature of the Son, while his short work *To Young Men on the Value of Classical Literature* is indicative of his interest in the formation of a distinctive Christian education.

### **Eunomius (c. 320/330–394)**

Eunomius was born in Cappadocia and was educated in Constantinople. Afterwards, he went to Antioch and Alexandria, where he became a pupil of Aetius, a pro-Arian theologian. The view that they shared was that the essence of God the Son is dissimilar (*anomoios*) to that of God the Father, which is why they were called Anomoeans. Eunomius became bishop of Cyzicus and wrote a number of works, which we know only through the reports of their critics, Basil and Gregory of Nyssa. They include an *Apology*, to which Basil replied by publishing his *Against Eunomius*, and *Apology of Apology*, to which Gregory of Nyssa replied with his own work, *Against Eunomius*. In a decree of March 398, the Emperor Arcadius ordered all Eunomian works to be burned (Synesius *Ep.* 5).

### **Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–396)**

Gregory was the brother of Basil of Caesarea. Gregory did not receive the kind of education that his brother did, but he was very able and was strong in understanding and handling philosophical matters. It is likely that Gregory became a professional teacher of rhetoric between 362 and 371, and in around 372 his brother Basil appointed him bishop of the small diocese of Nyssa. His writings, which mostly stem from the later part of his life, include treatises critical of the Arian doctrine, as had been revised by Eunomius in his *Against Eunomius*, *Homilies on the Six Days of Creation*, a follow-up to his brother's work. They also include his two philosophical masterpieces, *On the Making of Man* and *On the Soul and Resurrection*, which contain Gregory's views on human nature, on the status of the human soul, and on substance, and ethical treatises such as *On the Life of Moses* and *On Virginity*. Gregory also wrote a number of exegetical works, on the Psalms, the Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs.

### **Nemesius of Emesa (end of fourth century)**

All we know about Nemesius comes from his extant treatise *On Human Nature*, dated to the last decade of the fourth century. The author, Nemesius, is presented as the Bishop of Emesa in Syria. In his work Nemesius shows great familiarity with

the pagan philosophical and medical views on which he often draws, but also with current developments in the Church and in Christian thinking. Nemesius first places man in the universe and then discusses the human soul and its relation to body, which brings him to discuss the human emotions and then the question of free will and divine providence.

# FURTHER READING

## General

- Chadwick, H. (1966), *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
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- Frede, M. and P. Athanassiadi (eds) (1999), *Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
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- Warkotsch, A. (1973), *Antike Philosophie im Urteil der Kirchenväter* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh). (He selects key passages to important philosophical topics and discusses them.)
- Wolfson, H. A. (1970a), *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, 3rd edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Young, F., L. Ayres and A. Louth (eds) (2004), *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

## 1 The Christian conception of philosophy and Christian philosophical methodology

Useful reading for the ancient conception of philosophy is the paper by A.-H. Chroust (1947), “Philosophy: Its Essence and Meaning in the Ancient World”. *Philosophical Review* 56(1), 19–58. The attitude of Christians to philosophy is explored in many studies. I list some of them here:

- Boys-Stones, G. (2001), *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).  
 Edwards, M. (2008), “Origen’s Platonism: Questions and Caveats”. *ZAC* 12, 20–38.  
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 Trigg, J. (1985), *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third Century Church* (London: SCM Press).  
 Vogel de, C. (1985), “Platonism and Christianity: A Mere Antagonism or a Profound Common Ground?” *VC* 39, 1–62.

## 2 Physics and Metaphysics: first principles and the question of cosmogony

As background reading, especially for the discussion of cosmogony, the reader should consult the following studies:

- Sedley, D. (2007), *Creationism and its Critics in Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press).  
 Sorabji, R. (1988), *Matter, Space and Motion* (London: Duckworth).  
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 More specifically about the Christian debate, I recommend the following especially:  
 Köckert, C. (2009), *Christliche Kosmologie und Kaiserzeitliche Philosophie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).  
 May, G. (1978), *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts* (Berlin: De Gruyter; translated into English as *Creatio ex nihilo: The Doctrine of “Creation out of Nothing” in Early Christian Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994)).  
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 Steenberg, M. (2008), *Irenaeus on Creation* (Leiden: Brill).  
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 On the *ousia/hypostasis* distinction, see:  
 Frede, M. (1997), “Der Begriff des Individuums bei den Kirchenvätern”. *JAC* 40, 38–54.  
 Hammerstaedt, J. (1994), “Hypostasis”. *RAC* 16, 986–1035.

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### 3 Logic and epistemology

- Barnes, J. (2012), “Galen, Christians, Logic”, in *Logical Matters: Essays in Ancient Philosophy II*, 1–21 (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- DelCogliano, M. (2010), *Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names* (Leiden: Brill).
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- Havrda, M. (2016), *The So-Called Eighth Stromateus by Clement of Alexandria. Early Christian Reception of Greek Scientific Terminology* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, *Philosophia Antiqua* 144).
- Solmsen, F. (1973), “Early Christian Interest in the Theory of Demonstration”, in W. den Boer et al. (eds), *Romanitas et Christianitas*, 281–291 (Amsterdam: North-Holland).

### 4 Free will and divine providence

The best account on the ancient notion of will and of freedom of will is that of M. Frede (2011), *A Free Will: Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press), in which chapter 6 is dedicated to Origen. Also important are the following:

- Amand, D. (1945), *Fatalisme et liberté dans l'antiquité Grecque* (Louvain: A. M. Hackett).
- Bobzien, S. (1998a), *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Bobzien, S. (1998b), “The Inadvertent Conception and Late Birth of the Free-Will Problem”. *Phronesis* 43, 133–175.
- Boys-Stones, G. (2007a), “Human Autonomy, and Divine Revelation in Origen”, in S. Swain, S. Harrison and J. Elsner (eds), *Severan Culture*, 488–499 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Kahn, C. (1988), “Discovering the Will from Aristotle to Augustine”, in J. Dillon and A. Long (eds), *The Question of Eclecticism: Studies in Later Greek Philosophy*, 234–259 (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Sorabji, R. (2001), *Emotions and Peace of Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

### 5 Psychology: the soul and its relation to the body

As background reading about the ancient philosophical theories on the soul, I recommend the article by H. Lorenz (2009), “Ancient Theories of the Soul”, in E. Zalta (ed.), *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ancient-soul/>. See also G. Karamanolis and F. Zanella (2020), “Seele und Seelewanderung”. *RAC* 30, 107–177.

On the Christian theories of the soul, I refer the reader to the following studies:

- Apostolopoulos, C. (1986), *Phaedo Christianus: Studien zur Verbindung und Abwägung des Verhältnisses zwischen dem platonischen Phaidon und dem Dialog Gregors von Nyssa über die Seele und die Auferstehung* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang).

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- Osborn, E. (1981), *The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy*, chapter 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

## 6 Ethics and politics

There are many good presentations of ancient ethics. The following two are particularly rich and sophisticated:

- Annas, J. (1993), *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Cooper, J. (2012), *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).

Specifically on the ethics of early Christian thinkers, there is a huge literature. I single out the following:

- Knuutila, S. (2004), *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*, chapter 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Osborn, E. (1976), *Ethical Patterns in Early Christian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Sider, R. (2001), *Christian and Pagan in the Roman Empire: The Witness of Tertullian* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press).
- Thorsteinsson, P. (2010), *Roman Christianity and Roman Stoicism: A Comparative Study of Ancient Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

On the specific question of man’s assimilation to God, see the following:

- Fantino, J. (1985), *L’Homme image de Dieu chez saint Irénée de Lyon* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf).
- Merki, H. (1952), *ΟΜΟΙΩΣΙΣ ΘΕΩΙ: Von der platonischen Angleichung an Gott zu Gottähnlichkeit bei Gregor von Nyssa* (Freiburg: Paulus).



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### *Athenagoras*

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