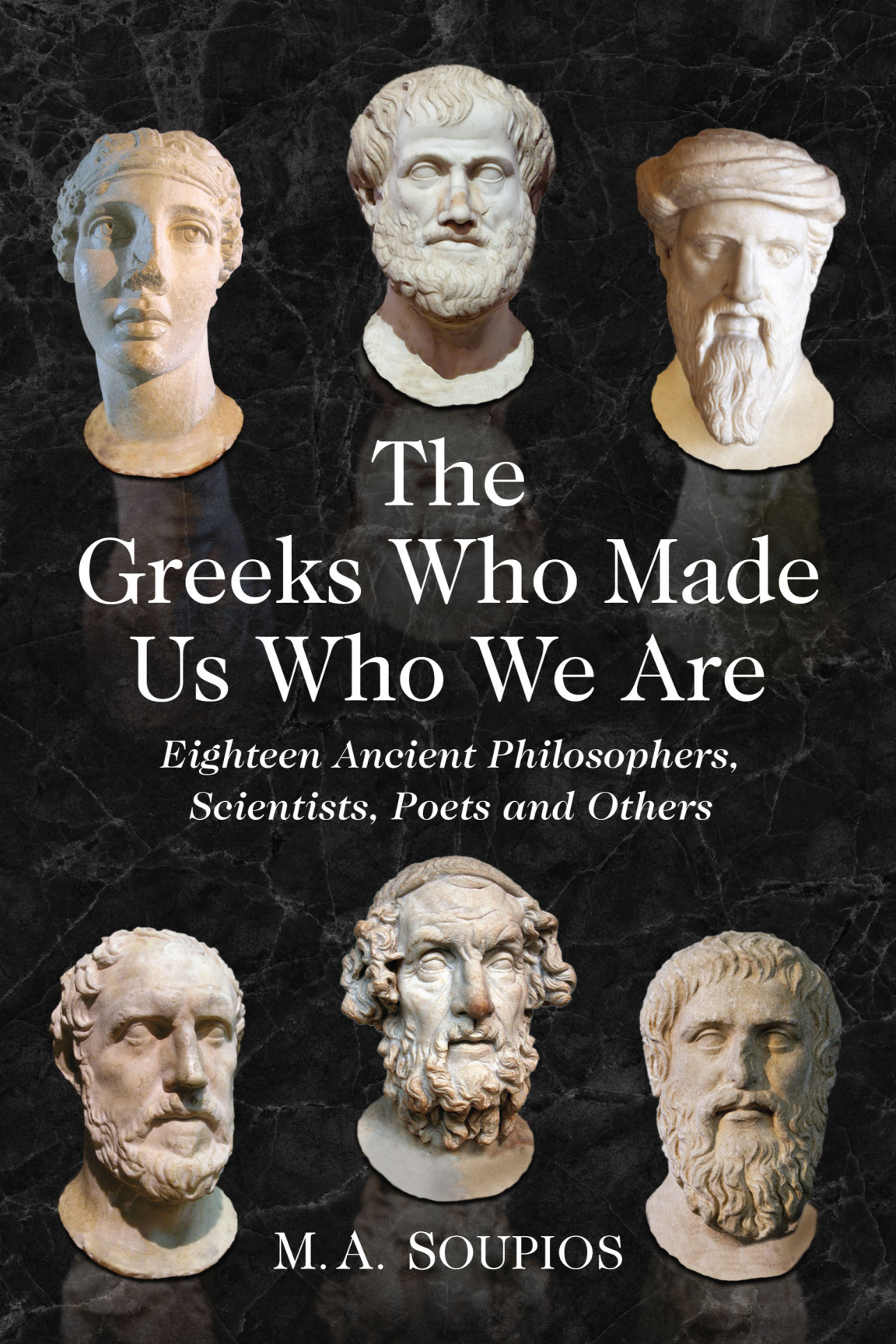

The Greeks Who Made Us Who We Are

Eighteen Ancient Philosophers, Scientists, Poets and Others

M. A. Soupios

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Preface

By age twelve virtually every schoolchild has acquired some basic understanding of the Hellenic contributions to Western culture. But as we move beyond generalities, beyond the iconic images of Greek art and renowned names such as Plato and Aristotle, we discover a remarkable thing, even educated adults are seldom capable of providing even a rudimentary account of the Greek legacy. Almost everyone, for example, is prepared to acknowledge Socrates as a pivotal figure in Western history, but when pressed to explain what exactly he contributed to the Western tradition or how his contributions helped distinguish the West from other world cultures, reactions typically range from a variety of nondescript bromides to bewildered silence. This book is offered as a medicinal response to these ailments. Its aim is to illuminate the defining essences of Western civilization (i.e., the fundamental attitudes and values that have differentiated the West from other civilizations) and, further, to demonstrate how these novel qualities share a Hellenic provenance. At the same time, it is not my purpose to advance the cause of Western chauvinism. No assertions of Occidental superiority will be registered in these pages. Nor will I seek to gainsay the Oriental leaven that unquestionably contributed to the formation of Western culture.

These objectives are appropriate as a result of at least two factors. First, there currently exists a general lack of appreciation for, and interest in, historical subject matter. Given the frenetic pace of modern life, we are, to say the least, disinclined to concern ourselves with historical questions like the developmental dynamics of the West. In such a climate, the idea that the past has anything meaningful to say to the present is a highly suspect premise. Under these circumstances, antiquity is unfairly reduced to little more than immaterial curiosity. Second, the effects of globalization and multiculturalism have contributed to a diminished appreciation of the West's special character. While the potential benefits of intercultural assimilations are undeniable, global convergence has tended to promote a serious

misapprehension that the West is merely one civilization among many and that its contributions to human culture represent little that is genuinely unique.

Each of the seminal figures presented in this text played an important role in establishing a fundamental aspect of the Western world's unique tradition. In addition to distinguishing themselves as major contributors in a variety of particular fields, such as mathematics, ethics, politics, and medicine, they have, in more general terms, also been responsible for advancing perspectives that have exemplified the Western world ever since. First, they fostered a new and unprecedented conception of human worth. The relevant term here is "humanism," a word more typically associated with Renaissance figures such as Petrarch, Erasmus, Bruni, and Agricola. However, the origins of what we think of as Western humanism are in truth traceable to classical antiquity and specifically to the Greeks, who consistently portrayed man in extraordinarily elevated terms. These deferential assessments were advanced across a broad spectrum of cultural imagery — mythological, poetic, aesthetic, and philosophical. In the end, however, all of these portraits are ultimately traceable to the Greek notion of man as a rational being. According to this idea, reason was the *areté*, or defining excellence, that set man apart. Among its many benefits, reason allowed man to craft a civilized existence, guided and informed by the liberating mandates of law. In addition, it allowed him to enrich his world with the blessings of art, literature, and music. Moreover, the Greeks understood reason to be a potential link to things cosmic and divine. This is what Plato indicates when he describes reason as a "sacred and golden cord" uniting heaven and earth. Reason extended man a unique opportunity to participate in the eternal rhythms of the universe and correspondingly made him something more than merely human. Unlike the Near Eastern civilizations that rigorously maintained the division between creator and creature, the Greeks viewed man as an interstitial being strategically situated between things mortal and things divine. This explains the frequency with which Greek heroes assert claims of divine lineage, as it does the peculiar Hellenic propensity to contest Olympian supremacy — one is reminded of the astonishing impudence Achilles displays toward Apollo in the *Iliad* and the many aspersions directed toward the gods in Euripidean drama. Assertions of human eminence also stand behind the sophist contention that "man is the measure of all things," as they do Aristotle's call to deification in the *Nicomachean Ethics* in which he advises his readers not to be content with human things alone, but to strive instead for immortality. These, and many other illustrations that might be cited, suggest that belief in the special worth and dignity of man is a congenital feature of the Western tradition whose origins

relate directly to the Greek penchant for making men of their gods (anthropomorphism) and gods of their men (apotheosis).

While the significance of these rarefied notions of humankind cannot be denied, there is one aspect of the Hellenic legacy that stands apart as the definitive imprimatur of Western civilization: the philosophic temperament. In referring to philosophy in this context, it is essential to comprehend accurately the peculiar habit of mind suggested by the term, "philosophy." Unfortunately, much of the original meaning and essence of philosophy has today been obscured as a result of indifferent attribution. Contemporary application of the word has become increasingly indiscriminate to the point that almost any attitude, belief, or approach now constitutes a "philosophy." As conceived originally by the Greeks, however, philosophy had a more restricted and precise meaning. Philosophy was the voice of insurgency. Those who "did philosophy" opposed society's efforts to bridle mind and imagination. Specifically, philosophy suggested a capacity, as well as a commitment, to move beyond the embalming effects of dogmatic authority. The "lover of wisdom" was *zetetic* in spirit and method, he sought heterodoxic insights dedicated to unmasking the tyranny of received opinion. It was not the philosopher's purpose to justify or abet incurious conventions, no matter how venerable or hallowed they might be. Rather than sanctify the immemorial prescriptions of culture, the philosopher's mission was deconstructive and incendiary. His job was to render verdicts of cultural insubordination, to function as the scalpel-tongued apostate who not only thinks outside the box but also seeks to dispose of the box entirely. In short and unique among ancient peoples, the Greeks evolved a cast of mind that advanced intellectual treason as a societal virtue. As a consequence, no area of their civilization, not even religion, was immune from philosophy's inquisitorial scrutiny, as the iconoclasms of men such as Prodicus, Diagoras, and Critias attest. Clearly, in lifting the yoke of credulous tradition from the neck of man, the Greeks accomplished a feat of monumental significance. Not only did they challenge and delimit the mindless claims of habitual perspectives but, most importantly, they also made the impassioned pursuit of truth a cultural imperative — not the meticulously managed "truths" of partisans and true believers but an intrepid truth born of unimpeded inquiry and critical assessment. The spirit of this new mindset is well summarized by what is, perhaps, the West's most emblematic apothegm: "The unexamined life is not worth living."

As the following pages will illustrate, it is the nexus of these rational-humanistic-critical elements that comprises the West's pioneering cultural pedigree, the source of those differential values and identities that continue

to inform and vitalize our world as they have for the last 2500 years. Few, if any, of these uniquely Western sentiments can be traced to the banks of the Nile, Euphrates, or Jordan rivers. Fundamentally, these furnishings of the Western mind were the autochthonous offerings of Hellenism and, more precisely, the gifts of individuals such as those presented herein who first presumed to see the world with new eyes — Western eyes.

Notes

1. The Bible speaks of man as created in God's image but the Greeks advanced the idea of men and gods sharing a common essence — a fundamental difference between Athens and Jerusalem.

1

Homer (Mid to Late 8th Century B.C.)

Founder of Western Humanism

In attempting to understand the forces that shape civilization, modern analysts typically focus their energies on a variety of social, economic, and political factors. If, however, one were interested in achieving the same insights for ancient Greece, it would also be necessary to add poetry to the list of key variables. As remarkable as this may sound, it is, nevertheless, a fact that the epic poetry of Homer served as the cultural bedrock of Hellas and subsequently for much of Western civilization as well. The ancient sources consistently attest to the cultural preeminence of this ancient bard. For instance, Xenophanes[1] said of Homer, "From the beginning, all have learned from him"; Plato described him as, "the poet wise in all things"; Aristotle referred to him as "the poet of poets"; Heraclitus[2] said all the Greeks were fed on his verses, "as if they had been our mother's milk"; Xenophon's *Symposium* speaks of a young man who can recite the whole of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* by heart; Plutarch records that Alexander the Great slept with a copy of the *Iliad* by his side; and Vitruvius describes how Zoilus, an outspoken critic of Homer, was sentenced to death by Ptolemy for his irreverence toward the father of all poets.

What these references suggest is that Homer was a potent and omnipresent force in the cultural life of ancient Greece. Indeed, he was a kind of *vade mecum* for Hellenes around the world — from Marseilles to India, from the Dnieper to the Nile, the Greeks clung to the Homeric epics as a matter of national pride and identity. Who, then, was this preeminent poet whose works were revered by the Greeks as a kind of "Bible" for more than 1,000 years? In posing this question, one is immediately confronted with a bewil-

dering array of uncertainties, perhaps the most fundamental of which is the so-called "Homeric question." Since at least 1795 with the publication of August Wolf's *Introduction to Homer*, some scholars have questioned Homer's very existence. Instead of attributing the epics to a single poetic genius, they view the poems as the crystallization of a centuries-old oral tradition — a position that received tentative corroboration from the pioneering research of the Slavic *guslars* (singers) conducted by Milman Parry (1933–1935). According to this theory, "Homer" is little more than a "personification" for an extended process of poetic compilation. Others have argued, chiefly along stylistic lines, that the poems reflect the unmistakable marks of a virtuoso poet, or at the very least the redactional activity of a brilliant editor.

In addition to the matter of his existence, there are numerous peripheral issues that also continue to occupy the scholarly community: Was Homer responsible for both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*?[3] Did Homer make use of a recently developed alphabetic system or did he rely upon traditional techniques of oral composition? What were the specific mechanisms of transmission by which we arrived at our modern "vulgate" of the poems?[4]

While today's scholars continue to ponder these and other matters relating to Homer, the ancients had no doubts. In their opinion, Homer was unquestionably a historic figure, a singer of songs, responsible for each of the great epics.[5] Moreover, the Greeks accepted these works as more than simply poetic masterpieces. They were also accepted as normative treatises in a variety of areas completely unrelated to poesy. In their view Homer was an invaluable source of historical, military, geographic, moral and theological wisdom — a kind of "tribal encyclopedia" for the entire Hellenic world. This extended credibility also explains why Homer's depiction of the Trojan War was readily accepted in antiquity,[6] as evidenced by the continuous reverence accorded the presumed site of Priam's city. Herodotus, for example, tells of a lavish sacrifice offered by Xerxes at Troy during his march west against the Greeks; Horace reports that Julius Caesar saw Ilium as the cradle of his race and actually planned to move the Roman capital back to the land of Aeneas; Arrian records how Alexander traveled to Troy in order to lay a wreath at the tomb of Achilles; and there are even reports that the Christian Emperor Constantine initially considered establishing his city on the Sigeum ridge rather than the Bosporus. Although modern archeology, including the celebrated excavations of Schliemann, Dorpfeld, and Blegen, has failed to unequivocally establish the historicity of the events depicted in the *Iliad*, the ancients viewed their honored minstrel as military historian as much as poet.

This extraordinary respect extended Homer in antiquity necessitates explanation. Specifically, there must be qualities beyond the aesthetics of his verse that earned Homer a status typically reserved for great statesmen, prophets, and lawgivers. In short, how does a poet become an architectonic force in the evolution of an entire culture? The answer to this question, while undeniably complex, ultimately rests with the power of a timeless message. Beyond the unerring symmetry of his meter, beyond the vivid portraiture of his similes, Homer enjoys his rank because he offers one of the most profound meditations on the human condition in history—all the more remarkable given the antiquity of these poems. Above all, it is the *Iliad*, with its sorrowful tale of loss and suffering, that distinguished Homer as the master poet of Greece. This, because no other work in Western literature has presented a more potent statement on the dignity of humankind.

There is a certain inconsistency, however, in the fact that Homer's message of human worth is conveyed by a poem in which men are butchered like cattle. The Mycenaean world immortalized by Homer's *Iliad* was characterized by a "shame" culture where even minor infractions of heroic etiquette tended to result in sanguinary outbursts. In addition, the poem's ferocity has been linked to the reality that "heroes," by definition, must acquire fame and glory. Unfortunately, these badges of heroic distinction are part of an agonistic economy in which honorific designation operates on a zero-sum basis. In other words, heroic stature can only be obtained at the direct expense of a competitor which means every man is, in principle, enemy to every other man. Were there nothing more to Homer than these grim images of slaughter and mayhem, there would be little to distinguish the *Iliad* from a host of other epic poems. In truth, however, Homer is unique in the Western literary canon. Significantly, his attitudes toward death are untypical of the heroic genre. At no time in the epic is death extolled. Even the most glorious episodes are never allowed to negate the fundamental hatefulness of the "bronze sleep." Moreover, Homer offers no solace for those willing to embrace the "hateful darkness." Unlike Roland, who, upon his death, is conveyed to paradise by an angel and two saints, the Achaeans are never solaced with a promise of bliss in the House of Hades.

What then is Homer's message regarding the mystery of death and dying? Clearly, he offers no simple endorsement of martial sacrifice as an end in itself. In fact, certain lines spoken by Achilles in Book 9 (318–22) of the *Iliad* actually seem to challenge the central premises of the heroic code. It may be that Homer is grasping at a higher truth, something beyond a conventional understanding of heroism's rewards. Every warrior at Troy recognizes that fame is the means by which he might come to enjoy a surrogate immor-

tality, how he might place his name on the lips of unborn generations. But Homer also intimates that the proper embrace of death presents a chance to register one's dignity and worth in a larger sense — not simply as a warrior, but as a human being. The *Theomachy* (war of the gods) presented in the Books 20–21 is designed to underscore this point.

As the human combatants prepare themselves for the final battle, there is a parallel mobilization on Mount Olympus in which the gods align themselves in support of the opposing earthly forces. In juxtaposing the war of men with the strife of deities, Homer calls attention to an essential fact — the struggle among the Olympians is a meaningless skirmish, as it must be for those immune to death's sting. Unlike their human counterparts, the gods risk nothing. They will never know reduction to ash and urn, nor will they experience the horrors of losing those they hold most dear. There are no such immunities extended to that "generation of leaves" we call humanity. But Homer also reminds us that those who confront death with courage and resolve not only negate ephemerality, they also elevate themselves to a height beyond the snowy crags of Mount Olympus. To refuse compromise and concession, to die for principle and ideal, earns for man a nobility and greatness that not even the gods can attain. This is the means by which a pitiful "generation of leaves" converts itself into a foliage of lasting significance.

Homer's final tribute to humankind is contained in *Iliad* 24, where an inspiring scene of healing and transformation is presented. There is no question that Homer's epic is, as Simone Weil noted, a "Poem of Might." But as she also fully appreciated, there is more to Homer's genius than the celebration of military prowess. Indeed, the closing scene of the *Iliad* is a conscious attempt to remind us that full humanity requires an awakening from that madness men call war. In addition, this proposition is conveyed with remarkable generosity. Homer scrupulously avoids the sort of ethno-provincialism one might anticipate in a work of this kind. At no point does he promote the superiority of his people over the enemy. In fact, the epic's most attractive figure is not Greek — it is Hector, Troy's greatest champion. This same spirit of impartiality guides the final exchange between Achilles and Priam where the disparities of victor and vanquished are completely annulled. Instead, the two men meet as co-sufferers, sobered by their losses and united by their tears. They have come to share a mutual empathy that not only blurs the ugliness of their prior antagonism but also points to an elevated heroism in which hatred of the opponent and contempt for those defeated is erased by larger insight. In the end, each man comes to possess something more precious than military reputation or kingly prerogative. They achieve a greatness of soul that summons humanity to a new spiritual understanding. It is here that

Homer registers his strongest claims to genius by compelling us to consider what a wondrous creature is man, this flicker of light between two eternities that bears the burden of life's crucible and emerges with soul ennobled and fortified.

Homer's role as the supreme, initiating genius of the Western epic is a fact acknowledged by laymen and experts alike. His poetry remains the ultimate standard against which all other epic works — everything from the *Aeneid* to *Paradise Lost* — are gauged. There also has been an increasing appreciation of Homer's progenitive role in the development of tragedy. Long before the "goat songs" of classical Athens, Homer had already presented his authoritative lament on the bitterness of human experience — a message that inspired Aeschylus, among others, and led him to confess that his own compositions were but "mere slices from Homer's banquet."

Although rarely cited in such matters, Homer must also be credited with having impressed upon Western culture a variety of values, ideals, and images that remain operative to this day. Very few, for instance, comprehend the role played by the *Iliad*'s agonistic imperative in shaping virtually every facet of Greek life.[7] Moreover, they fail to grasp the degree to which this same competitive ethos continues to resonate in the West and how Homer's "contest" is still being played out in venues as diverse as our athletic fields and corporate boardrooms.

In addition, we have been derelict in acknowledging Homer's contributions to the development of Western humanism — one of the defining features of our civilization. Although "humanism" is commonly associated with the Renaissance, and is often specifically linked to the thought of Petrarch, Ficino, and Erasmus, in truth, the foundations of this uniquely Western orientation must be traced to a much earlier source. Homer was the first to insist upon a new and elevated understanding of human identity. In light of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, man would no longer be seen as a mere footstool for the Olympians or as some wretched pawn helplessly battling the malignant whims of fate. Even though forces unseen and inexorable may crush him, even though he may invite and augment these forces with his own folly and blindness, still, according to Homer, there is something splendid and admirable about this "shadow in a dream."[8] In presenting this image of human grandeur, Homer not only reminds us that man, for all his frailties, remains a wondrous creature, he also invests the West with much of its human-centeredness. It is for this reason that Homer deserves to be seen as something more than the premier poet of ancient Greece; he is better acknowledged as the poet laureate of the party of humanity.

Notes

1. Xenophanes and Plato both criticized Homer, but neither thinker could deny his influence.

2. Not the 5th century philosopher but a later literary commentator.

3. Of the two poems, the *Iliad* is generally considered to be the earlier work, dating from the second half of the 8th century B.C.

4. Our version of the poems may be distantly related to standardized texts produced at Athens in the mid–6th century but are probably more directly derived from Alexandrian and Byzantine editions.

5. However, the ancients did debate his point of origin. At least six cities in the ancient world claimed him as a native son. The two leading contenders were Chios and Smyrna.

6. The Greeks were confident enough in the historicity of the Trojan War to speculate on the precise moment of the city's demise. Doulis of Samos believed the final collapse occurred in 1334 B.C., whereas Herodotus cites 1250 B.C. as the probable date. And the Alexandrian scholar Eratosthenes believed Ilium was sacked in 1184 B.C.

7. Two essential works on this subject are W.H.A. Adkin's *Merit and Responsibility* and the earlier, pioneering text of J. Burckhardt, *History of Greek Culture*.

8. This phrase belongs to Pindar—*Pythian Odes* 8.95.

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2

Solon (630 B.C.–560 B.C.)

Poet, Lawgiver, Statesman

Of the long list of renowned figures produced by the city-state of Athens, none merits the title "statesman" more than Solon. Not only did he offer the Athenians a powerful spiritual instruction on the virtues of *eunomia* (good order), he also initiated a series of political, social, and economic reforms that spared Athens the ravages of *stasis*, or internecine war, a civic nightmare afflicting much of the ancient Greek world (e.g., Megara, Samos, Miletus, Syracuse). In addition, these experiments launched the Athenians on a series of bold new paths resulting in unprecedented prosperity and a political system (democracy) that would alter the course of world history. Not surprisingly, centuries later Athenians consistently attributed their *patrios politeia* (ancestral constitution) to Solon and all the Greeks invariably acknowledged him as one of the Seven Sages.[1]

Although many of the available biographical details regarding Solon are obvious embellishments, the following can be said with reasonable certainty. He was born circa 630 B.C., perhaps on the island of Salamis. Aristotle (*Ath. Const.* 5.3) describes him as a man of the first rank socially, although financially, he placed Solon among the middle class. This disconnect between social and economic status was the result, according to Plutarch (*Sol.* 2), of his family's excessive generosity. Solon first began to acquire public prominence during the struggle against Megara for control of Salamis. He composed an elegiac poem reproaching the Athenians for their lack of resolve, referring to his countrymen as *Salaminaphetae* or "betrayers of Salamis." Stung by these rebukes, the Athenians intensified their efforts and, perhaps under Solon's leadership, prevailed in their efforts to secure the island.

The crucial moment in Solon's public career came in 594 B.C. when he accepted the post of *archon*, or chief magistrate. In the early 6th century

Athens was a city-state divided against itself. With political dynamics as ugly as they were partisan, the prospects of civil war seemed all but certain. Rather than capitalize on these instabilities to establish a tyranny, Solon instead offered himself as *diallaktes* (mediator). Situating himself between the warring factions, he "stood with a strong shield thrown before both sorts, and would have neither to prevail unrighteously over the other" (Edmonds 5–6).[2] On the one hand, Solon needed to restrain the rapacious appetites of the *eupatridai* ("the well-fathered ones") who were bent on despoiling the small freeholders to the point of servitude. On the other, he had to prevent the commoners from mounting a bloody rebellion that might destroy the very foundations of civilized existence at Athens. In other words, he understood the necessity of reforms capable of negating the twin evils of *hybris* (arrogance) and *koros* (excess). Both parties were to be assigned and guaranteed their due share of privilege and honor without allowing either group to encroach upon the legitimate prerogatives of the other. Nothing in Solon's methods suggests an ideologically driven agenda — in these matters he was a neutral third party opposed to any radical reconstruction of Athens' social tapestry. What we discover instead is a series of moderate adjustments and judicious realignments that helped immunize the city against internal struggle.[3]

In the process of initiating his reforms, Solon learned an important lesson: "In great matters it is hard to please all." These words, attributed to Solon in Plutarch's *Life of Solon*, reflect the frustrations he experienced upon implementing his new laws. The aristocracy protested the new arrangements had gone too far while the commoners objected that they had not gone far enough. Besieged by complaints on all sides,[4] Solon left the city after securing a pledge from the Athenians to extend his laws a lengthy trial period.[5] The ancient sources vary significantly with regard to his itinerary and often include a variety of colorful encounters with foreign luminaries, including several that are entirely heedless of chronology.[6] According to Diogenes Laertius (50) his sojourn involved visits to Egypt, Cyprus, Sardis, and Cilicia. Plutarch (2.2) claims Solon was already an inveterate traveler prior to the archonship, having journeyed abroad for financial reasons or perhaps to simply gain worldly experience. Plutarch also states that Solon eventually returned to Athens, aligning himself against the tyrannical aspirations of Peisistratus. However, Diogenes Laertius insists he never returned to Athens but died at Cyprus, from whence his ashes were eventually brought to Salamis and scattered.

The first, and perhaps the most important, action taken by Solon was to extend debt-relief to the lower classes. This measure was known as the *seisachtheia*, or "shaking off of burdens,"[7] and it may well have forestalled an all-out civil war at Athens. The term specifically relates to a system of loans

extended to small farmers by rich landholders who then laid claim to the peasants' property if the subsidy went unpaid.[8] Over time this system created a class of Attic sharecroppers known as the *hektemoroi* ("sixth-parters"), who were obliged to surrender a sixth of their annual crop to the creditor. Since security in this transaction was made *epi somasi* (i.e., on the person), default meant slavery for the peasant and/or his family. The *eupatridai* relished these arrangements for obvious reasons; not only did they stand to acquire more land, they also ensured themselves an indentured labor force to work their new properties. Solon, unlike others of his social rank, understood the injustice of this situation. More, he grasped the potentially catastrophic implications of reducing the lower classes to servitude. To the great consternation of the highborn, Solon took action. He nullified existing debts, liberated those who had been enslaved, recalled those who had fled or had been sold abroad, and prohibited security on the person. Undoubtedly, the *seisachtheia* must have dealt a serious financial blow to many of the great families, but the ancient sources suggest Solon magnanimously agreed to share in the economic pain. Plutarch reports that the "disburdening" cost Solon five talents in forfeited loans, while Diogenes Laertius cites a figure of seven talents.[9]

In an effort to further stabilize the situation in Athens, Solon also initiated a revision of the *telē*, or property orders, by which social and civic status were assigned. According to Plutarch (*Thes*. 25.1–2), Theseus had originally established three orders — the *eupatridai* (landed gentry), the *geomoroi* (farmers), and the *demiourgoi* (artisans). But Solon's new constitution was based on a system of four classes: the *pentakosiomedimnoi* or "five hundred bushel men" (i.e., men whose land yielded at least 500 *medimnoi*[10] of produce annually); the *hippeis*, or those whose farms could yield 300–500 *medimnoi* per year; the *zeugitai* (from *zeugos*, "yoke"), whose land produced 200–300 *medimnoi* per year; and the *thetes*, whose farms produced up to 200 *medimnoi* annually. A new system was born: political privilege would now be determined by economics rather than genetics. Senior administrative posts such as the archonships and the treasurers of Athena were reserved for members of the top class (*pentakosiomedimnoi*), while citizens of the lowest rank (*thetes*) were excluded from holding public office.[11] In principle, this aspect of the Solonian reform provided a means of upward mobility in terms of both social status and political standing. An enterprising citizen now had an opportunity to amplify his political voice by expanding his financial assets — no longer would the matter of humble birth pose an insuperable obstacle to advancement. Moreover, the new arrangements left open the possibility that monetary income might at some point replace agrarian income.

Solon's reform agenda also included revision of the political institutions

of Athens. The ancient royal advisory council known as the *Areopagus* was not directly altered by Solon but this bastion of aristocratic privilege did stand to lose some of its patrician character as a result of the new property orders. Only ex-archons could sit on this council and since the archonships were originally reserved for the *eupatridai*, the *Areopagus* had been monopolized entirely by the nobility. When, however, Solon substituted property eligibility for blood qualification, it made access to this council possible even for those who were not "well-fathered."

The chief magistrate positions remained largely unaltered by Solon, with two exceptions. First, he is credited by some of the ancient sources with having organized the *archons* into a board with an eye toward members serving as a check on each other. Second, Solon granted all citizens the right of appealing magistrate's rulings to a new popular court known as the *eliaia*. In Aristotle's opinion (*Ath. Const.* 9.1), this allowance was a major turning point in the constitutional history of Athens because, by permitting an inclusive popular jury to rule in these appeals, the people became the *de facto* sovereign force within the state. Thus, if there is any one feature of Solon's reforms that could be termed "radical," this may be it, although the long-range implications of this innovation could not possibly have been anticipated at the moment of implementation.[12]

The *ekklesia* (popular assembly) in some form most certainly predated Solon's innovations. In fact, Homer offers testimony for the existence of such arrangements in the *Iliad* (Book 2). What distinguishes Solon's assembly from earlier institutions is the scope of public involvement. For the first time the *thetes* were afforded a fully acknowledged right of participation. This, in conjunction with their new status as jurors, explains why Solon wrote that even in their dreams, the people could never have imagined the benefits they now enjoyed.[13]

Perhaps in an effort to temper the newly enfranchised commoners within the assembly, Solon also created a council of 400 comprised of one hundred representatives from each of the four *phylae* (tribes). This body served in a *probouleutic* capacity vis-à-vis the *ekklesia* (i.e., it established the assembly's agenda in advance of its deliberative sessions). At least initially, the council of 400 must have had the ability to substantially restrict much of the *ekklesia*'s authority. As the system Solon helped establish continued to develop, however, the powers of the popular assembly expanded dramatically and became the definitive voice of Athens.

In addition to the cancellation of debts, the reconfiguration of the social orders, and the restructuring of governmental mechanisms, Solon was also responsible for a variety of new legislation. These initiatives covered a wide

range of subjects, including prostitution, homosexuality, libel and oral abuse, vagrancy, inheritance, marriage, public ostentation, and filial obligations. In addition to refining and extending previous legal foundations,[14] the intent of Solon's legislative activities may well have been to foster a new spirit of "public sensitivity." A good illustration of this point is seen in the law making public prosecution available to all citizens. Criminal prosecution would no longer remain a private affair reserved to those personally affected.[15] Not only did the new arrangement delimit the prospect of feuds and vendettas by making the state the adjudicative agent, it also conveyed the larger message that "anybody's wrong was everybody's business," a sorely needed acknowledgment given the degree to which private interests tended to dominate legal affairs in ancient Greece.

An effort to create a new civic consciousness may also explain a law attributed to Solon outlawing neutrality during times of political dissension. At first blush this regulation may seem like a dangerously ill-conceived bit of lawmaking. About the last thing any Greek city-state needed was legally mandated partisanship. Indeed, one might have sooner anticipated legislation prescribing impartiality in light of the virulent factionalism that plagued so much of Greece's political history. Fortunately, the sources do attempt to explain this seemingly misguided requirement. Aristotle (*Ath. Const.* 8.5) suggests Solon saw fence-sitters as derelict members of the community, content to step aside and let civic matters slide. Plutarch (*Sol.* 20.1) advances a comparable view, arguing that Solon would not permit men to remain indifferent in matters of the commonweal, insisting instead that every citizen must shoulder political burdens in defense of righteous cause. It may also be that Solon recognized neutrality's potential to promote extremism. In the absence of widescale public involvement, the lethal poisons of factionalism enjoy the opportunity to gather their potency. But when the entire civic company is compelled to invest itself, the result is a dilution of the radicalism espoused by extremist minorities. This logic might also stand behind the Athenian tendency to organize public officials into boards and may even relate to that peculiar reference to "idiots" in the Periclean funeral oration.[16]

As an adjunct to his political and social revisions, Solon also implemented a variety of economic reforms, the spirit of which clearly suggests a keen understanding of the critical relationship between economics and *eunomia*. No legal system, no matter how artful its design or how just its objectives, can hope to endure in the absence of economic stability. Accordingly, Solon launched a series of new policies aimed at ensuring the long-term financial well-being of Athens. Perhaps the most important of these were the metrologic and, especially, the numismatic innovations.[17] The currency unit known as

the *mina* had been comprised of 70[18] *drachmae* but was now reconfigured to contain 100 *drachmae* (Aristotle, *Ath. Const.* 10). This change probably benefited those carrying debt, allowing them to more easily discharge their obligations. But what Aristotle in fact may be describing is Athens' transition from the Aeginetic to the Euboean standard. The former system was used throughout the Peloponnese and is traditionally attributed to Pheidon, an Argive king of the early 7th century B.C. The latter was employed over much of mainland Greece and the islands of the southern Aegean. Solon's adoption of the Euboean system not only redirected Athens away from the economic orbit of political antagonists such as Aegina and Megara but also facilitated Athens' extension of its commercial activities to Chalcidice, southern Italy, and Sicily.[19]

Solon is also credited with having imposed regulations upon the import and export of certain produce items. Olive oil, which was produced in abundance at Athens, was traded abroad without restriction. The export of all other agricultural products, however (particularly the precious corn crop), was forbidden. The reason for this prohibition relates not only to the continuously meager supply of corn produced domestically at Athens but also to the speculative sale of Attic corn abroad. The effects of such transactions would have been to further reduce supply for consumption while inflating costs to Athenian consumers.[20]

Solon's prescience in economic matters is also seen in the measures he took to supply Athens with a skilled labor force. First, he passed a law requiring that fathers attend to the education of their sons by arranging instruction in a craft. Failure to meet this obligation relieved the son of any future responsibility to care for the father in old age. In addition, Solon encouraged an influx of artisans and craftsmen from abroad. The inducement here was the prospect of receiving citizenship. In the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. Athens jealously restricted the extension of civic status, with the result that few *metoikoi* (resident aliens) ever enjoyed citizens' rights. But Solon apparently viewed this measure as an indispensable tactic in his overall strategy to resource and make firm the new regime. It seems, too, that these policies were not lost on Peisistratus, who did much to foster peace and prosperity at Athens by promoting public works projects, stimulating industrial output, and making land grants and low-interest loans available to the poor.

Given the immense significance of Solon's legislative activities, it is not surprising that some have identified him as the father of Athenian democracy. Even Aristotle (*Ath. Const.* 9.1 and *Pol.* 2.9.2), who surely enjoyed advantages of time and place modern scholars can only dream of, endorsed this attribu-

tion. In truth, Solon was neither a democrat himself nor the founder of democracy at Athens. The laws he constructed were, as he himself described, "ordinances for noble and base alike." In short, he made "middleness" the governing logic of his reforms, refusing to indulge either the aristocracy's goal of Athenian helotry or the people's demand for *isomoiria*, a general redistribution of the land. In choosing this middle path, Solon helped his native land avoid the horrific bloodletting that rent the social and political tapestry of so many other city-states. In the absence of his moderate and honorable guidance, *stasis* might well have precluded the subsequent democratic achievements of Cleisthenes, Ephialtes, and Pericles. It is fair to say, therefore, that while Solon may not have invented Athenian democracy, he did foster the institutional and spiritual climate that made its development possible.[21]

In particular, there are three features of the Solonian legacy that not only contributed to the creation of the world's first democracy, but also remain to this day the standard for any genuinely democratic regime. First, there is the imperative of controlling and delimiting political authority. Greek attitudes in this regard were colorfully expressed by certain apothegms attributed to two of Greece's legendary sages, Pittacus of Mytilene (c. 600 B.C.) and Bias of Priene (c. 570 B.C.). The former asserted that "office shows the man." In other words, the best way to reveal the true essence of a man's being is to invest him with power and then study his actions. Bias is said to have stated explicitly what Pittacus implied—"most men are bad"—therefore acknowledging the reality of man's misuse of power and endorsing Solon's belief that men cannot be trusted in these matters. Accordingly, he established a system of "checks and balances": the *eliaia* seeks to check the magistrates; the magistrates check each other by operating collectively; the second council checks the *ekklesia*; the *Areopagus* checks the civic community as a whole; and the laws check the government and the governed alike. Long before Locke, Montesquieu, or America's Founding Fathers, Solon understood the necessity of such controls.

Another aspect of the Solonian legacy that left a powerful mark on Western political traditions involved the rule of law. From earliest times the Greeks had acknowledged law's salvational role in human affairs. Not only did it provide a bulwark against barbarity and chaos, it also ensured a stable, nurturing environment in which the rights, freedoms, and opportunities requisite for human development were made available. In the absence of law, the logic of Thrasymachus[22] invariably tended to prevail—"might makes right." Solon was fully conversant with the beneficence of law and, as a result, he insisted that *nomos* must be crowned king. Further, he contended that no class, no group, and no individual should be allowed to operate independently of law's

benign strictures. All must abide by the limits, so that all might receive the gifts. Thus, Solon envisioned law as the greatest and most holy of societal goods: "Under its [laws] rule all things among mankind are sane and wise."

Solon's respect for rule of law and legal due process was extraordinary for the early 6th century B.C., but it represented only a portion of his civic genius. More remarkable by far was his thorough recognition that laws per se were not guarantees of fair play and decency: observance of the letter of the law is not the same as commitment to the spirit of the law. In light of this, Solon endeavored to make justice a living precept among his people. He advanced this facet of his reforms by consciously exploiting the pedagogic potentials of both his laws and his poetry.[23] Therefore, Solon can be seen as more than just a lawgiver. He was also a civic pedagogue who ultimately sought a conversion of Athenian hearts and minds.

The impact of his legal instruction was far reaching. First, he reminded the Athenians that disaster inevitably pursues those who remain heedless of right. In the end, there is no gate strong enough nor any wall high enough to shelter the wrongdoer.[24] Moreover, Solon was quick to exonerate the Olympians in these matters. The calamities attending injustice are of uniquely terrestrial manufacture. They are self-inflicted wounds, the product of human intemperance and excess. In addition, Solon reckoned the larger social consequences of injustice. A particular misdeed may appear to affect only a proximate few but Solon recognized that private wrongs may ultimately result in wounds against the entire social organism — injustice for one can escalate into injustice for all. Thus, unrighteousness in any form must be deemed a common evil to the extent that it may contribute to *demosion kakon* (public ruin).[25] In order to avoid chaos in the civic realm, justice must be approached as something more than simply a matter of procedural guarantee. True justice, justice in the most comprehensive sense, is only achieved when notions of right and fairness are embraced on the level of conscience. Solon understood that a failure to instill justice in these terms directly imperiled society because, in the absence of such deeply held sentiments, partisan ambition can make a mockery of legal guarantee. In essence, then, what Solon attempted to promote at Athens was an entirely new political sensibility. The laws he offered his city-state were as much moral admonishments as they were statutory correctives. Their extended aim was nothing less than an attempt to mitigate the intransigent mentalities that inevitably defile and disrupt civic order.

To take the measure of Solon's greatness as a legislator, reformer, and statesman is to arrive inescapably at the following conclusion: Solon was one of the most important political figures in Western history. Throughout his

brief tenure as *archon* he consistently manifested qualities of honor and decency that elevated him above the fratricidal politics of his day. At all times he remained a trustee of the general welfare, never an agent of partisan cause. In addition, the seductions of office proved powerless to deflect him from his public mission. By conducting himself in this principled manner he not only exemplified in his own person the critical distinction between a mere political and a genuine public servant,[26] he also endowed Athens with a standard of civic idealism without which the democratic experiment might not have occurred.

In themselves, these achievements are enough to place Solon among a rarefied group of political leaders. But in truth Solon's ultimate legacy may lie with the immensely important theory of justice he offered his people and, by extension, Western culture. Solon correctly surmised that the true foundations of justice were not simply procedural. Specifically, he understood it was wrong to assume that righteousness was an intrinsic feature of a legal system. Laws are interpreted and applied by men; as such, they invariably mirror the dispositions of those administering them. Accordingly, *eunomia* is attainable only when a moral-political nexus becomes a resident feature of political culture. In short, "good order" is as much about *paideia* as it is about skillfully crafted legislation. An institutional "form" such as separation of powers or "checks and balances" means little if the human "matter" remains unfaithful to moral imperative.[27] Thus measures against miscarriages of justice ultimately have as much to do with hearts and minds as they do with structure and process. For all their worth, the latter are too easily subverted by those maliciously dedicated to special interest. To his lasting credit, Solon appreciated all of this, and, more importantly, he had a solution. Inscriptions on *axones* (tablets), in and of themselves, were unequal to the task of avoiding the bitter gall of political factionalism. What was also needed was a spiritual inscription, a civic epigraph etched on men's hearts obliging them to forswear the sanguinary path of power politics. And for this reason Solon must be designated a profound and timeless contributor to the Western political tradition.

Notes

1. The proverbial wisdom ascribed to Solon includes two of ancient Greece's most famous aphorisms: "know thyself" and "moderation in all things." The second apothegm, in particular, served as Solon's operational premise in reforming Athens.

2. Solon's unwillingness to establish a tyranny led some to ridicule him as a fool: "Solon was a shallow thinker and a man of counsel void; when the gods would give him blessings, of his own will he refused." To which he responded, "And if I spared my land, my native land, and unto tyranny and violence implacable did not set hand, polluting and disgracing my fair fame, I'm not ashamed; in this way rather shall my name be set above that of all other men" (Plutarch, *Sol.* 14.5–6).

3. Many other Greek city-states were less fortunate. Consider, for example, the

Corcyrean *stasis* (Thucydides 3.81) or the carnage at Miletus (Athenaeus, *Deip*. 12.524a). The bitterness of these violent animosities are powerfully conveyed in the poetry of the Megarian aristocrat, Theognis (350), who prays to Zeus that he might drink the blood of his plebian opponents.

4. In one of his poems, Solon describes himself as a wolf surrounded by many hounds.

5. Plutarch (25.1) says the laws were to remain in effect for 100 years. Herodotus (1.29) reports a period of 10 years.

6. The famous interview with Croesus is perhaps the best example of this tendency. Another can be found in Herodotus (1.30), where Solon is said to have conferred with the Egyptian king, Amasis.

7. Another name for the policy was *chreôn apokopê*, or "the cutting off of debt."

8. In one of his poems, Solon mentions freeing the dark earth by uprooting the *horoi*, or mortgage stones, that signaled a parcel of land was under pledge. In so doing, he helped avoid the development of Attic *latifundia* that later proved so disastrous to Sparta and, of course, Rome (see Aristotle, *Politics* 2.4.4).

9. Diodorus Siculus (1.65) claims Solon acquired the idea for "disburdening" on an early trip to Egypt, where he learned of similar reforms made by a pharaoh named Bocchoris.

10. A *medimnos* was a wet/dry measure of agricultural produce corresponding to 50 liters of liquid or 1.5 bushels of grain or fruit (i.e., about 85 lbs).

11. However, the *thetes* were permitted to vote for magistrates and were also allowed to participate in the popular assembly and courts. In addition, they were exempt from taxation and military service.

12. Aristotle (*Ath. Const.* 9.2) notes that some people in his day argued Solon purposely left his laws vague so that disputed interpretations would be forwarded to the jury-courts, thereby making the people sovereign. Aristotle correctly rejects this logic, noting that it is wrong to assess Solon's motives from events occurring centuries later.

13. See Aristotle, *Ath. Const.* 12.5.

14. These legislative activities constituted a major departure from the old Draconic Code. Plutarch (*Sol.* 17.1) claims Solon essentially repealed all of Draco's laws, with the exception of the homicide statutes, because of their excessive severity.

15. Although in cases of homicide, it remained the obligation of the family alone to prosecute.

16. At one point in the *Epitaphios*, Pericles refers to those who take no part in public affairs (*idiōtēs*) as not simply minders of their own business but also good for nothing (see Thucydides, *History* 2.40.2).

17. The use of coins in the ancient world probably began in Asia Minor in the second half of the 7th century B.C. When the Greeks first began to use coinage remains an object of debate.

18. Plutarch (*Sol.* 15.4) claims the pre–Solonian *mina* contained 73 *drachmae*.

19. See I. Linforth, *Solon the Athenian* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1919), esp. 291–94.

20. Anxiety over cereal supplies was a chronic concern for Athens. It explains Athenian interests in establishing a post on the Pontic corn route, which they accomplished with the seizure of Sigeum around 600 B.C.

21. In this regard, Jaeger is correct in describing Solon as the "creator of Athenian political culture." See *Paideia*. Vol. I, chapter 8.

22. Thrasymachus, a sophist living in the 5th century B.C., was famous for his views on justice as presented in Plato's *Republic*, Book I.

23. Perhaps these didactic elements represent a rebuttal of sorts to the Scythian, Anacharsis, who thought Solon naïve for believing that law per se could resolve political discord.

24. See Solon's elegiac poem cited in Demosthenes' *On the Embassy* and again in the Edmonds translation of *Greek Elegy and Iambus* (4).

25. See G. Vlastos, "Solonian Justice," *Classical Anthology* 41 (1946): 65–83.

26. The reader will note the term "selfless" has not been used to describe Solon's activities. The Greeks were not deontologists. Their notions of duty were always attached to considerations of advantage or benefit. In Solon's case, rejection of the tyranny meant his name would "be set above that of all other men" (Plutarch, *Sol.* 14.5).

27. The American Founding Fathers rejected this idea of attempting to convert the human "matter." In *Federalist* #10, Madison explicitly dismisses as impracticable the idea of reducing factionalism by instilling uniform opinions and passions. The founders hoped to achieve "justice" by structural means, not pedagogy, an approach that highlights a fundamental distinction between ancient and modern political strategies.

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3

Thales (Early 6th Century B.C.)

Father of Western Science

Few would challenge the view that science is a characteristic feature of modern life, or that it has historically served as a defining essence of Western culture. Other, non–Western civilizations were certainly familiar with the rudiments of scientific endeavor, but it has long been argued that the West (and more precisely the ancient Greeks) was first to initiate genuine scientific inquiry. Indeed, it has been suggested that the term "science" itself really means "thinking about the world in the Greek way" and that scientific reasoning has never emerged among peoples uninfluenced by the Greeks.[1] But how accurate are these assertions? To begin with, there is the issue of definition. What exactly do we mean by the term "science" in the ancient context? Can we legitimately characterize the activities of Thales and his Milesian cohorts as scientific in the modern sense of the word? Next, are we justified in anointing the Greeks as the uniquely inventive source of a scientific worldview? How were their perspectives and approaches distinguishable from those of the Babylonians, Egyptians, Indians, and Chinese? Finally, if in truth the Greeks do merit unique attribution in these matters, how does one account for their uncommon achievement?

The assessment of these and other related questions must begin with a brief analysis of the philosophical activities of Thales, the patriarch of Ionian speculation. Unfortunately, there is virtually no primary documentation available to aid in this inquiry, with the result that we must rely upon a roster of epitomists, compilers, and doxographers, many of whom are more interested in advancing their own views than conveying an accurate account of the facts. Biographically speaking, we are told that Thales flourished in the early 6th

century B.C. and that he was a native son of Miletus, a prosperous Greek city-state on the coast of Asia Minor. Traditionally listed among the seven wise men of ancient Greece, Thales is portrayed as a multidimensional sage responsible for a variety of achievements in fields such as engineering, geometry, and astronomy. It is said, for example, that Thales served as a military engineer to King Croesus during the campaign against the Persians, at which time he facilitated the Lydian army's crossing of the Halys by diverting the river's flow (Herodotus 1.75). He is also reported to have calculated the height of the Egyptian pyramids by the lengths of their shadows and to have discovered at least five mathematical theorems. In addition, Thales allegedly predicted the solar eclipse (May 28, 585 B.C.) that concluded the war between the Lydians and the Medes (Herodotus 1.74).

The ancient sources also suggest that Thales' intellectual gifts extended beyond the theoretical domain to include practical matters as well. He is credited, for example, with having urged the Ionian Greeks to confederate against a growing Persian menace — Miletus was eventually destroyed by the Persians in 494 B.C. Similarly, Aristotle (*Pol.* 1.4.5.) relates how Thales' knowledge of astronomy helped him anticipate a bumper crop of olives at Miletus and Chios, prompting him to lease all the oil presses at off-season rates. When harvest time arrived, he realized a handsome profit by subletting his presses.

It is very difficult to assay the accuracy of these details, given the penchant for embellishment among ancient authors. Along these same lines, modern scholars have legitimately challenged several of the mathematical achievements ascribed to Thales as well as his ability to have foretold the solar eclipse of 585 B.C. Similar cautions are also necessary in considering Thales' quest for the *arche* (i.e., the fundamental and universal "stuff" underlying reality). This term, and others such as *apeiron* and *stoicheion*, are actually part of a lexical template superimposed upon the Milesians by Aristotle. In applying such terms to the ancient naturalists, Aristotle employed a complex, technical language unavailable to any 6th-century thinker.[2] The effect has been to further muddy what were already murky waters, making the reconstruction of Presocratic thought all the more difficult.[3] Accordingly, the exact nature of Thales' contributions to Western science remains a matter of considerable uncertainty.

Traditional interpretations state that Thales identified water as the elemental substrata. At first glance there is little in this identification suggestive of a scientific breakthrough, given the fact that a variety of mythological traditions express essentially the same view. The chief Babylonian creation myth described Apsu and Tiamat as the primeval waters upon which Marduk acted to create sky and earth. Similarly, the Egyptians identified Nun as the principal

water deity and oldest of the gods. Atum, the sun god, emerged from this aqueous source and Geb (earth) was imagined to float on water as well. It is reasonable to assume that Thales was acquainted with Eastern mythological traditions such as these given the extensive commercial outreach of his native city. It is estimated that by the 6th century B.C., Miletus had established some ninety colonies throughout the eastern Mediterranean, including the all-important site of Naucratis on the Nile delta. When, therefore, Thales asserts that water is the original source of the world and that earth floats on water (Aristotle, *de Cael*. 2.13 and *Meta*, 1.3.5), it is difficult to dismiss as mere coincidence such parallels with Eastern myth.

It seems clear, then, that Thales' ideas were partly indebted to ancient cosmogonic teaching. At the same time, however, his views represent a historic first step in the demystification of the world because despite its often unrefined and naïve features, Thales' scheme nevertheless registers one absolutely pivotal point — water is a natural substance, not a god. By maintaining this idea as a central feature of his worldview, Thales established the critical prerequisite for nature's exorcism. Specifically, this idea suggests that explanations for natural phenomena must be sought in nature itself, not supernatural agency. By extension this logic also hints at two crucial corollaries. First, if nature is immune to the fickle intrusions of the Olympians, then it is reasonable to perceive nature as a cosmos — an orderly and systematic domain. Second, if indeed nature is in some sense a "lawful" environment, then it can be legitimately approached as an object of human inquiry subject to rational decoding. As a result of notions such as these, Thales and his Milesian colleagues have been credited with establishing a bold new chapter in the history of Western thought. But how definitive was this break with previous understanding, and to what extent was it distinguishable from the activities of other ancient peoples?

Again, care must be exercised in addressing such questions. While no one should minimize the accomplishments of these pioneering thinkers, adulatory phrases such as "The Greek Miracle"[4] have tended to overdraw and inflate the capacities of 6th century speculation, suggesting degrees of scientific discernment that were impossible for the times. In short, Thales did not spring from the brow of Zeus with full scientific competence. He is better seen as a transitional figure in the progress from *mythos* to *logos*. Accordingly, his accomplishment is to be understood less as a giant leap forward and more as a nuanced departure from orthodox views. Thus, what he and the other Ionians can be credited with is nothing less (and nothing more) than a seminal first step in the creation of a rational world-picture that would eventually come to typify Western culture.

But how unprecedented were the views advanced by thinkers such as Thales? What of the great Near and Far Eastern cultures, people such as the Babylonians, Egyptians, and Chinese? Are we to believe that the spirit of scientific inquiry was entirely nonexistent among these civilizations? Arriving at this question makes it necessary to lend some precision to the term "science." Despite the ease and frequency with which this word is used today, there is a surprising variety of ways in which it has been understood. Perhaps the best way to address this definitional issue is to offer a composite description, a roster of fundamental criteria in the absence of which there can be no meaningful notion of "science." This is the method advanced by G.S. Kirk,[5] who proposes the following four questions as a means of certifying the scientific spirit. First, is the object of investigation approached in a rational and uniform fashion? Second, does the inquiry seek a broad and systematic understanding of the subject matter? Third, is the investigation unrestricted and wide-ranging? Fourth, are traditional positions and received opinions critically assessed and set aside where appropriate? Despite many methodological deficiencies (e.g., a rash reliance upon analogical reasoning, an intemperate love of theoretical speculation, and a deliberate indifference toward experimentation),[6] the case can be made that the ancient Greeks do in fact qualify as the first scientists in history. In this regard, the modern fascination with "method" must not be allowed to distort the assessment. There is something more important, more foundational than scientific method — scientific attitude. This is the true test for any claim to scientific status. It is the fundamental ingredient from which all else flows, including the eventual development of a systematic procedure. Thus, to the extent that the Greeks approached their analysis of nature in an unrestricted and wide-ranging manner; to the extent that they sought broad explanations unfettered by the foreordained verdicts of received opinion; and, above all, to the extent that the Greeks brought a rational lens to their inquiries, they earned the right to be judged genuinely scientific. This last premise in particular must be assigned pride of place in the attainment of a scientific perspective. Reason is the indispensable pre-condition by which science emerges from the mytho-religious shadows. This necessity explains Benjamin Farrington's observation that science requires the deletion of Marduk.[7] In other words, the gods must first be scattered in order for there to be science. As long as the spirit of rational inquiry remains indentured to religious tradition and sacerdotal mandate, natural philosophy is quite literally "unthinkable."[8]

We have determined that the Greeks were, *mutatis mutandis*, legitimately scientific in terms of mentality and inclination, but what of the view that their achievement was without precedent or parallel? In fact, a strong case can

be made that the Milesians were uniquely scientific despite the impressive achievements attained by other ancient peoples. Arguments to the contrary are misleading and distortive to the extent that they fail to distinguish between science and technology. These are not synonymous terms. The latter has occurred in many cultures throughout human history, but science, as identified here, has occurred only once — ancient Greece. The Chinese, for instance, were outstanding engineers who outpaced the West with the invention of such things as moveable type, the magnetic compass, and gunpowder. However, the proper product of science is not a tool or commodity but an idea. This is the defining unit of scientific investigation, and it is precisely this quest for larger understanding that is absent from the researches of ancient China.

Much the same can be said of the record left by the Babylonians and the Egyptians. There is no question that works such as Babylon's Hanging Gardens and Egypt's pyramids were astonishing engineering feats. But these undertakings were not pursued in an effort to verify a theory or demonstrate some architectural principle. Rather, they were aimed at achieving purely utilitarian objectives.[9] In fact, none of the distinguishing features of legitimate scientific thinking stand behind any of these projects. Specifically, there was no element of global curiosity, no interest in constructing integrative hypothetical models, and no concern for the formulation of comprehensive explanations.

But what of astronomy and mathematics? The Babylonians were justly famous in antiquity for the calculation of celestial events, as were the Egyptians for their monumental tombs and temples. One may ask, how could any of this be accomplished in the absence of scientifically conceived mathematics? Here again, science and technical ingenuity must not be taken as equivalents. Science, properly understood, involves a certain aspiration and outlook that is conspicuously lacking among the Babylonians and the Egyptians. When, for example, the Babylonians turned their eyes skyward, they made no distinction between astronomy and astrology. Moreover, their purposes in observing the heavens were entirely related to civic utility — that is, the stars were held to provide predictive data regarding king and country (Lloyd, "Origins" 8). Over time, the Babylonians compiled an extensive archive of observed periodicities that allowed them to construct accurate calendars and to predict astronomic events. But at no time did any of these activities move beyond a purely computational phase. Specifically, their investigations failed to evolve beyond the level of observation. There was no effort here to advance from the visual to the conceptual, no attempt to provide for the phenomena by way of explanatory models. The Babylonians were satisfied to simply observe without any understanding of that which underlay their observations, and it is precisely this empirical contentment that renders Babylonian astronomy unscientific.

Similar conclusions must be drawn in assessing Egyptian mathematics. There is no question that an edifice such as the Great Pyramid, which remains to this day one of the largest structures ever created by man, required a remarkable degree of mathematical sophistication. We are not, however, entitled to assume from this that the Egyptians ever developed a scientific conception of numbers. Their mathematics were entirely dedicated to "applied" purposes, a point noted with considerable disdain by Plato (*Rep.* 435e; *Laws* 747b-c). A good illustration of these practical intentions is found in the Rhind papyrus (c. 1650 B.C.), our most extensive source of information regarding Egyptian mathematics. Here we encounter a variety of mathematical "problems," but these deal exclusively with expedient concerns, such as the number of loaves or jars of beer obtainable from a gross measure. Calculations such as these correspond to what the Greeks called *logistiké* (to reckon or count), and it is likely that here the Greeks borrowed significantly from the Egyptians. But none of the surviving documents suggest the scribes of ancient Egypt ever elevated their computational techniques to the level of a science. Just as in ancient China and Babylonia, the Egyptians were dedicated to *praxis*, not *theoria*, and as a result, one searches in vain for the Nile equivalent of a Thales, much less a Euclid or an Archimedes.[10]

We must still consider the peculiar elements of Greek culture allowing for the emergence of scientific reasoning. As suggested above, the most significant of these cultural features involved an unusual capacity to contain and delimit the weight of religious precept. As Eduard Zeller notes (*Outlines* 3), the Greeks seem to have recognized early in their history that much of their religious thought was the product of "artistic imagination" and that there were alternative explanations, of a specifically non-theistic nature, as to the composition and operation of the world. In great measure, this perspective was fostered by certain unique social arrangements in ancient Greece that included no kings, no authoritative priesthood, and no sacred literature. In the absence of these normative voices, the Greek mind enjoyed a degree of freedom and mobility without parallel in other ancient societies.[11] As a result, conventional belief, including articles of faith, was less likely to ossify into incontestable dogma.[12] Thus, when the gods spoke in Egypt and Babylon, men listened, but in Greece men not only listened, they also questioned, challenged, and doubted, which helped engender new ways of understanding the world and man's special place in it.

This last point, the idea that mankind enjoyed a privileged status in the larger scheme of things, may also have contributed to the emergence of scientific rationalism. When Sophocles (*Antigone* 369) referred to men as the greatest wonder in a world filled with wonders, he articulated one of the dis-

tinguishing features of Hellenic culture — a premise we find deeply embedded in Greek mythology, drama, and philosophy. Above all other assets, it was man's cognitive capacities that were wondrous and set him apart from other creatures. And it was specifically this ability to reason that separated man from his naturalistic setting and bracketed nature as a distinctively "other" domain subject to human scrutiny. The significance of this "objectification" of nature for the development of philosophy and science is tellingly illustrated by a comparison with the teachings of Lao-Tzu, the 6th-century B.C. Chinese mystic who founded Taoism. According to the Taoistic tradition, there is an integral unity between heaven and earth, between man and the natural order. It is in this sense that all things are "one," and it is also for this reason that the wise seek to live in harmony with the primordial rhythms of the universe. The ancient Greeks had an entirely different outlook. The Milesians were among the first thinkers in human history to prescind themselves from the natural realm, creating thereby a critical disjunction between "knower" and "thing" to be known. In the absence of this Archimedean distance (i.e., as long as the human mind remains conceptually submerged in the natural landscape), there can be no science because natural philosophy is predicated upon the "discovery" of nature.

A final feature of Hellenic culture that may have facilitated the birth of science relates to the political conditions of ancient Greece. In marked contrast to the sociopolitical circumstances of the great Near Eastern civilizations, the Greek city-state (c. 7th–6th century B.C.) developed a civic consciousness that included free discussion and open debate. Here, as in almost every other facet of their lives, the agonistic spirit of the Greeks played a prominent role. Just as the politicians attempted to demolish the political premises of their adversaries, so too the philosophers sought victory over their conceptual foes. But this process was not merely a matter of assailing an opponent's foundational premises; it also entailed an energetic attempt to immunize one's own position against criticism.[13] In the process of formulating their defenses, the early philosophers developed a rigorous standard of "demonstration" as a means of fortifying their own positions against counter-assault. Strategies such as these led directly to the development of the axiomatic-deductive method, a hallmark of mathematical and logical reasoning. This spirit of unfettered public discourse, in conjunction with the demands of rational demonstration, was critically important in fostering a scientific worldview.

Any effort to summarize the achievements of Thales and the other *physiologoi* requires both caution and qualification because in the full procedural sense of the word, none of these early thinkers can be called "scientists."

Rather, their ideas are better understood as protoscientific, as precocious first steps in a long rationalistic journey. Nor should this come as a surprise, given the antiquity of the Milesian experiment. The incredible strides of modern science have resulted in massive discontinuities between our world and ancient times that no amount of philhellenic enthusiasm can bridge. Under these circumstances, the only meaningful comparison we can attempt is between the Milesians and their non–Hellenic contemporaries.

With these provisos in mind, we are free to conclude the following about Thales and his associates. The Milesian world-picture, for all its simplicities, nevertheless marked a new dawn in the history of human understanding. At a time when the rest of the world was in awe of religious opinion, Thales drove the plowshare of reason into the dogmatic soil of conventional belief. He and those who followed promoted a new rival "faith," premised upon a philosophic conviction that the world was intelligible and devoid of preternatural influence. In advancing these claims, the early naturalists not only initiated the necessary prerequisite for all subsequent scientific inquiry, they also established the rudiments of a rational-critical spirit that became the defining essence of Western culture. As a result of their efforts, the tribunal of reason became a sovereign and liberating force in human affairs. That is to say, they were instrumental in defeating the votaries of credulous belief, ending thereby a despotism of mind that had long precluded a rational understanding of the world.

Perhaps the best way to express these innovations is to invoke the phrase made famous by Thomas S. Kuhn—"paradigm shift."[14] The Thalesian moment can be seen as the first, and perhaps the most fundamental, of all paradigm shifts. As the West's formative tradition-shattering thought experiment, it prepared the groundwork for later landmark transitions we associate with the names Copernicus, Newton, and Einstein. And to the extent that these modern thinkers operated in a culture where they were free to stretch their imaginations in a bold and unbridled manner, each was in some sense indebted to those intrepid pathfinders from Miletus who first lifted the yoke of conceptual servitude from the neck of mankind.[15]

Notes

1. See J. Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy* (London: Black, 1963), v, and R. Robin, *Greek Thought* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1928), 32.
2. See *Meta*. 1.3.1–7.
3. See H. Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Presocratic Philosophy* (New York: Octagon Books, 1976).
4. This memorable description belongs to the French historian Ernest Renan.
5. See *The Nature of Greek Myths* (London: Penguin, 1974).

6. The medical historian Charles Daremberg said it well when he suggested that the Greeks explored nature with their eyes closed.

7. See Farrington, *Greek Science* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1966).

8. The lingering use of the word "god" by Thales is not a contradiction. He employs the term as a non-religious epithet equivalent to "ageless" or "deathless" (see J. Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 14).

9. The Hanging Gardens were allegedly constructed by Nebuchadnezzar to console Queen Amytis, who longed for the mountain greenery of her Median homeland, while the purpose of the great pyramids of Giza was to house the physical remains of the pharaoh, Khufu.

10. The same can be said of the Ganges. The ancient Indians did develop a "philosophy" of sorts, but, as Hegel notes, it was virtually indistinguishable from religion: "The Indian view of things is a Universal Pantheism, a Pantheism, however, of Imagination not of Thought" (*The Philosophy of History* [New York: 1900], 141). Science and philosophy as conceived by the Greeks is inconceivable in such an environment.

11. See W. Burkert, *Babylon, Memphis, Persepolis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2004), chapter 3.

12. The willingness of the ancient Greeks to question or even attack their religious traditions was unique in antiquity. Presocratics like Xenophanes raised the issue of religious relativism and Heraclitus vilified Homer, the greatest of Greece's religious teachers, saying he should be beaten and "flung out of the contest." During the classical era, Protagoras argued that man (not God) was the measure of all things (see Plato's response in *Laws* 716c). Aristophanes' comedies often demean members of the divine pantheon, and Euripides' dramas frequently portray the gods in a negative light. To this roster we can also add Diagoras of Melos, Critias of Athens, Prodicus, and Euhemerus.

13. See G.E.R. Lloyd, *Early Greek Science: Thales to Aristotle* (New York: Norton, 1970), chapter 1, and "On the Origins of Science," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 105 (2000): 10.

14. See T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

15. The treatment of Galileo in the 17th century A.D. not only demonstrates the costs of religious obscurantism but also illustrates the extraordinary nature of the Milesian emancipation 2,200 years earlier.

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4

Sappho (612–580 B.C.)

Poet on Fire

Classical scholars have long noted the many misogynistic restrictions imposed upon women in ancient Greece. Although the degree to which women suffered these indignities varied in terms of social status and specific time period, it is fair to say women were consistently assigned an inferior role in this male-dominated culture. Generally, their function in society was to supervise the domestic affairs of the household and to produce legitimate heirs — specifically, male children. Needless to say, this was not an environment in which a woman might easily develop and express her gifts. It is, therefore, all the more remarkable that the lyric poetess Sappho came to enjoy an acclaim comparable to that of Homer and Hesiod.

The unstinting praise accorded Sappho's verse in antiquity speaks to her irrepressible talents. Plato, for example, is said to have designated her the tenth muse. Alcaeus referred to her as "violet crowned" and "holy." Strabo called her a "marvelous creature" and noted that no woman ever came close to rivaling her poetic genius. In his *Critical Essays*, Dionysius of Halicarnassus labeled her compositions masterpieces of the "smooth style," and in one of Lucian's works she is described as "the delicious glory of the Lesbians." In addition, the Alexandrians deemed her the only woman worthy of inclusion among the nine great lyric poets of archaic Greece. Indeed, her poetry was so highly regarded, she was even accorded a numismatic tribute by her native city of Mytilene.[1]

Laudation for Sappho in the modern era has been no less passionate. C.M. Bowra has declared her the most gifted woman to ever write poetry. J.A. Symonds echoed these sentiments, insisting that every word she wrote reflected "absolute perfection and inimitable grace." Similar sentiments have also been expressed by noted British poet and literary critic A.C. Swinburne, who bluntly declared that Sappho was "the very greatest poet that ever lived."

Who, then, was this woman, and what did she achieve poetically that earned her the commendatory enthusiasm of so many? Modern scholars believe she was born at Eresus on the island of Lesbos in approximately 612 B.C.,[2] although she would spend the bulk of her life in the town of Mytilene. Chronologically, she was a contemporary of poets such as Alcaeus and Stesichorus and of the Mytilenean tyrant, Pittacus. In terms of social status, Sappho must have been a member of the nobility — a conclusion drawn from the fact that she had the leisure to compose her poetry as well as a brother whose status allowed him the position of cupbearer at the town hall. Positions such as these were reserved exclusively for young men of proper birth. We are also told she was married, allegedly to a rich man named Cercylas from the island of Andros.[3] She is said to have had a daughter named Cleis, who is mentioned in her poetry (e.g., fr. 98b). According to the Parian Marble,[4] Sappho was forced to flee Mytilene in the early 6th century, almost certainly for political reasons. It is said she resided during this period on the island of Sicily. Presumably, it was upon her return from this exile that she composed the poetry that made her famous.

These are the "facts," as best we know them, concerning Sappho's biography. In addition, we have a considerable amount of spurious detail regarding the poetess' personal life. Given the amorous nature of her poetry, it is not surprising that various ancient sources were inclined to extend the horizon of her romantic attachments. She was, for example, linked to several poets, including Archilochus, Alcaeus, and Hipponax. (While a romantic tie between Sappho and Alcaeus is not impossible, any relationship with the other two poets is precluded on chronological grounds.) Above all, it was the playwrights of Middle Comedy (4th century B.C.) who took special liberties in portraying Sappho as a woman of dubious sexual virtue. In this regard, we know of at least six plays that not only bear her name but also portray various amorous escapades. There are also two titled "Phaon," a mythological ferryman and favorite of Aphrodite with whom Sappho is said to have fallen hopelessly in love, and another five plays titled "Leucadian," a reference to the cliffs from which Sappho supposedly threw herself in response to Phaon's rejection.[5] What all of these works seem to share is a tendency to portray Sappho as a promiscuous misfit devoid of moral compass. In presenting her in these terms, the comedic authors were in no way expressing some unique prejudice against Sappho. Rather, they were drawing upon a vast reservoir of stock images and attitudes regarding the intoxicating effects of eros and the inherently vice-prone nature of the distaff side. Therefore, in order to fully see the woman Sappho and to understand her achievement, it is necessary to examine the cultural environment in which she operated and to specifically offer some assessment of Hellenic perspectives on love and women.

Eros the Thief of Reason

The ancient Greeks fully appreciated the many forms and varieties that love could take. They clearly understood heterosexual, homosexual, parental, filial, fraternal, patriotic, and intellectual love. They also acknowledged the conditions, however limited, under which love might bestow genuine blessing. But by far the most pervasive imagery of love among the Greeks is that of a potent, maddening force that steals the wits of every man or woman unfortunate enough to be victimized by its irresistible powers. These ideas are assertively conveyed by the terminology employed by Greek poets in their attempts to reveal love's effects (e.g. piercing, crushing, bridling, roasting, stinging, biting, grating, grinding, poisoning, singeing, melting, etc.). The contrast with contemporary ideas of romantic attachment is, to say the least, unequivocal. Nowhere in the extant ancient literature do we find anything equivalent to our St. Valentine's Day portraitures. There are no cherubic figures benignly fluttering about the heads of the smitten. Nor is there anything approximating the courtly love of medieval times or the chaste, spiritual ardor personified by Dante's Beatrice. Suffice it to say that according to the Greeks one does not fall in love — one is overcome by love, in the same way one is overcome by an infectious disease. Accordingly, for the Greeks love suggests *pathemata*, an affliction of body and soul, for which there are no ready remedies.[6]

Among the many commentaries on eros provided by the Greek poets, there is a remarkably uniform assessment of love's dizzying effects. In the *Odyssey* (4.293–96), for example, Helen laments the love-induced blindness that was the source of so much suffering:

> I grieved too late for the madness
> Aphrodite sent me, luring me there, far from my dear land,
> forsaking my own child, my bridal bed, my husband too,
> a man who lacked for neither brains nor beauty.

The same views are offered by Hesiod, who, in the *Theogony* (120–22), warns of love's irresistible might:

> Eros, who is love, handsomest among all the immortals
> who breaks the limb's strength,
> who in all gods, in all human beings
> overpowers the intelligence in the breast,
> and all of their shrewd planning.

Similar valuations are made by Archilochus (c. 650 B.C.) who describes love as the "limb-loosener"; Anacreon (c. 520 B.C.) who writes that "with his huge hammer again Eros knocked me like a blacksmith"; Ibycus (c. 550 B.C.), who

likens the onset of love to the disorienting effects of a Thracian whirlwind; and Theognis (c. 540 B.C.), who depicts love as a "weaver of wiles," warning his audience that no one is wise or strong enough to resist this delirium.

The verdict offered by the Athenian dramatists provides further corroboration of love's malignant properties. In his *Antigone* (788–790), Sophocles describes eros in the following manner:

> Wave of the sea is love, wind on the mountains.
> Neither deathless gods nor mortals escape it.
> The good it turns to evil, the wise to folly,
> All men to madness.

Euripides, who is by far the most psychological of the ancient tragedians, offers a particularly dim view of love, describing it as a "sickness," a "madness," and a "deadly infection" in his *Hippolytus*, a work that became a paradigmatic illustration of love's dreadful potency.[7] Comedic playwrights, too, including Aristophanes, present love as a toxic energy. In the *Ecclesiazusae*, the women do not sing of Eros' joys but rather beg release from love's torturous bonds. Even the gods seem incapable of resisting the seductive disorientations of love.[8] In Greek mythology, Apollo is described as being spellbound by the beauty of a youth named Hyacinthus, as was Zeus by the physical charms of Ganymede, the son of Laomedon.[9]

Greek views of love rendered by myth and poesy are plentiful but what of the more "intellectual" testimonies? One might expect that a culture that took such pride in asserting man's rational essence would present a wide variety of counter-images illustrating the superiority of mind over loin. In truth, the descriptions are remarkably consistent with poetic imagery. Herodotus (5.18), for example, records a scene in which Persian emissaries are feted at the Macedonian court of King Amyntas. After the banquet, the royal concubines are seated opposite the honored guests, who immediately complain that this seating arrangement is inappropriate and that the women should be seated next to the men. The reason for this peculiar objection, Herodotus explains, is the provocative effect beauty has upon masculine desire. Seated directly in front of the men, these women literally brought "a pain to the eyes" of the Persian envoys. By offering this example of optical torment, Herodotus lends further credence to the apparently universal view that erotic passion is an irresistibly powerful force against which rational agency is helpless.

One might reasonably assume, however, that a pillar of philosophic sobriety such as Socrates would be immune to the prurient urges that agitate less disciplined individuals. Significantly, these assumptions are not supported by the ancient sources, even in the case of Socrates. In one of Plato's early works, a young man named Charmides (for whom the dialogue is named) is described

as a paradigm of masculine beauty whose extraordinary comeliness completely unnerves all who view him. Upon seeing the lad for the first time, Socrates experiences the same disequilibrium that afflicts everyone else. Plato speaks of Socrates' "catching on fire" and continues by having Socrates describe his own internal state as being overcome by the appetites of a wild beast.[10] These same ideas are expressed later by Cicero, who in his *Tusculan Disputations* reports an exchange between Socrates and a famous physiognomist named Zopyrus.[11] Upon studying the philosopher's facial contours, Zopyrus concludes that internally Socrates, despite his quiescent exterior, is in truth a bubbling cauldron of passions. Socrates' associates dismiss this assessment as patently ridiculous, but the philosopher himself acknowledges the accuracy of Zopyrus' appraisal. What both Plato and Cicero seem to be saying is that no one is entirely exempt from the disquieting effects of eros — not even the philosophers can hope to entirely extinguish these anarchic flames. While it may be possible for a rare individual to temporarily constrain concupiscent impulse,[12] eros remains a constant and universal threat capable of overwhelming even the most virtuous of men. Accordingly, the Greeks tend to speak in one voice on the subject of love: Beware the gifts of Aphrodite!

The Fair Sex

Gender relationships in ancient Greece were, to say the least, highly asymmetrical. With rare exception, women were the object of a systematic disparagement virulently expressed in political, social, and psychological terms.[13] Along with barbarians, children, and slaves, women were understood to be in need of continuous custodial supervision from their male superiors. Only under carefully orchestrated circumstances might a woman properly execute the tasks assigned her by nature — childbearing and management of the *oikos* (household). Left to their own devices, women were seen as a potential source of menace to everything contributive of order and harmony. Significantly, these imperious masculine assumptions were not framed as mere social conventions but were advanced instead as ontologically ordained. In other words, a woman's inferiority, and the corresponding necessity of rigid masculine supervision, were taken as aspects of the order of Being. Women were inherently an inadequate and potentially disruptive segment of the species in whom the negative essences of humanity enjoyed a dangerous concentration and potency. These ideas were fully expressed in the famous "table of opposites" put forth by the Pythagoreans. Clearly, the polarities presented in this schema are offered from a normative perspective. One column represents a series of

positive attributes, and the other a listing of negative cognates. On the positive side we encounter terms such as "good," "limit," "straight," "light," and "male." On the negative side, the listing includes "bad," "unlimited," "crooked," "darkness," and "female."[14] In short, women, by their very nature, are closely aligned with dark and sinister forces. Specifically, they occupy a liminal position in the economy of civilized life and are therefore a constant potential source of disruption and chaos.[15]

These negative images were powerfully reinforced by a wide-ranging misogynistic polemic dedicated to the maintenance of patriarchal supremacy. Among the ancient poets, for instance, the depreciation of woman was a well-worn *topos.* In his *Theogony* (590–92), Hesiod describes Pandora (meaning "many gifts") in the following manner:

> From her comes all the race of womankind,
> the deadly female race and tribe of wives
> who love with mortal men and bring them harm.[16]

Similarly, Semonides, a mid–7th-century master of iambic and elegiac verse, is famous for a remarkable diatribe against women. In a taxonomy inspired by the animal kingdom, Semonides describes various categories of women (e.g. the sow, the vixen, the donkey, the weasel, the monkey, etc.). The composite imagery of his poem leads to an inescapable conclusion — as a group, woman are radically "other," avaricious, licentious, deceitful, bibulous, and gossipy. Only one unit of this nefarious tribe has any merit in Semonides' eyes — the bee. Unlike her sisters, she is hardworking, loyal, discreet and a source of joy to her husband. The poet describes such women as a very special, but rare, boon from Zeus.[17]

The ancient playwrights were also inclined to discommend women in no uncertain terms. In a fragment from a lost play titled *Synkrisis* (1.209–210), the comic author Menander offers this observation:

> A man who teaches a woman to write
> should recognize that he is providing poison to an asp.

In his *Hippolytus* (638–44), Euripides expresses analogous views concerning the dangers of a learned woman:

> I hate a clever woman — God forbid
> that I should ever have a wife at home
> with more than woman's wits! The limits of their minds
> deny the stupid lecherous delights.

Even the role of women in the procreative process is belittled on the Greek stage. In the *Eumenides* (658–61) by Aeschylus, Apollo defends Orestes by minimizing the familial ties between mother and son:

> The woman you call the mother of the child
> is not the parent, just a nurse to the seed...
> the man is the source of life.

In Euripides' *Medea* (568–75), the hero, Jason, laments the necessity of womankind's very existence:

> Men ought to beget children somewhere else,
> and there should be no female race.[18]

Perhaps some portion of the gender chauvinism we encounter in Greek verse can be attributed to the inflations of poetic license — exaggerations advanced in the name of dramatic effect. In truth, however, the depreciation of women also extends to a variety of non-poetic contexts (including philosophic and scientific domains) where their presence can only be understood as a reflection of deeply embedded cultural prejudice. For example, in his noted treatise on household management, Xenophon has a young husband boast of his wife's proper upbringing prior to marriage. In particular, he notes that she has been carefully supervised, "in order that she might see and hear as little as possible, and ask the fewest possible questions" (*Oeconomicus* 7.5).

Aristotle, in both his philosophical and biological treatises, tends to advocate the same mentality. In *Politics* (1.2–3) he advances a strongly hierarchical understanding of the natural order of things whereby some are destined to command and others fated to obey — by their nature, women fall into the second category. The reason why women are in constant need of masculine stewardship,[19] according to Aristotle, is listed in his work *History of Animals* (8.10–15), where he describes women as uniquely prone to despondency, shamelessness, deception, dishonesty, and a long, grudging memory. Aristotle's summative assessment of the fair sex is contained in a notorious passage in his *Generation of Animals* (2.3.29) where he declares women to be a "deformed" version of men.[20]

These same pejorative assessments are also found in the eleven gynecological treatises contained in the Hippocratic Corpus. To those familiar with the spirit and methods of ancient Greek medicine, this may come as a surprise, particularly in light of the strongly rational-empirical approaches found in such works as *The Sacred Disease*, *Ancient Medicine*, and *Epidemics*. When it came to women, however, cultural ideology tended to outweigh medical science (i.e., the prejudicial outweighed the rational). A good illustration of this is found in a 4th-century B.C. document titled *On Virgins* (8.466–70). The commentary contains both etiological and prescriptive statements regarding the ubiquitous theme of feminine instability. The author explains that virgins are particularly susceptible to violent, suicidal outbursts produced by an

unnatural accumulation of blood in the womb. During these episodes, the girl is described as "insane"; she will say dreadful things, experience visions, and attempt to take her own life by choking or drowning. The remedy for all this is sexual intercourse which stimulates the resumption of normal blood flow — that is, pregnancy is the prescribed cure.[21]

Not surprisingly, many of these "scientific" insights found their way into the legal codes of Greek city-states. In particular, the statutory suppression of women at Athens seems to have been particularly acute, despite the city's distinguished record of progress and enlightenment in so many other areas. As in most city-states, women in Athens were not considered *politai* (citizens). As such, their ability to own and control property was extremely limited, which meant virtually all women were economically dependent upon their *kyrios* — a male guardian (typically a father or husband).[22] This, in turn, greatly minimized opportunities for social autonomy.[23] Women were also subject to certain extreme penalties under the law, particularly in cases involving violations of sexual abstinence. Solon had prohibited enslavement of Athenians in the early 6th century B.C., but if a guardian detected an unmarried female *in flagrante delicto*, he was entitled to sell her into bondage. Needless to say, there was no similar punishment in opposite cases. A pronounced double-standard operated in ancient Greece in favor of masculine indiscretion.

What, then, was the "glory of woman" in ancient Greece? The answer is found in the Funeral Oration of Pericles presented in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* (2.46). The ideal woman, according to this famous Athenian statesman, was the one who is "least talked about among men, whether in praise or blame." In other words, the most laudable female is the one who remains invisible. And if seen, her skin should be white,[24] her voice muted, and her demeanor subdued. Notwithstanding these gender inequalities, Sappho's extraordinary poetic talents were not to be denied.

The Poetry

The isle of Lesbos had a long and distinguished poetic tradition starting with the myth of Orpheus, whose dismembered head and lyre were said to have landed on the island. Other noted poets, such as Terpander and Arion, were also said to have hailed from Lesbos, as did later figures such as Alcaeus and Anacreon. All of these individuals, including Sappho, were lyric poets, so named because their verse was designed to be "sung to the lyre."[25] Typically these poets were *citharoedos*, or solo singers. Solo lyric is also called "monody" as opposed to choral composition. The poetry presented by Sappho is almost entirely monodic and is written in the Lesbian vernacular, a branch of Aeolic

Greek. Structurally speaking, Sappho's verse follows the conventional patterns of lyric monody — short, frequently repeated stanzas, with simple metrical forms.[26]

Unfortunately, the bulk of Sappho's poetic production has been lost to us. We have only one complete poem (an address to the goddess Aphrodite)[27] and 10 substantial fragments, plus roughly 50 pieces of papyrus that include tattered remains of cultic hymns, satires, references to her family, and wedding songs known as *Epithalamia*.[28] The evidence, scant as it is, suggests that Sappho composed her poetry for a variety of purposes and occasions, although the majority of what survives is of a highly personal, non-ceremonial nature. What all of her works tend to share are certain stylistic features that have made her an object of unqualified praise for nearly 2,600 years. By the term "style," reference is made to that mysterious blend of creative insight in conjunction with a meticulous attention to the mechanical details of poetic construction. For example, Sappho has an uncanny ability to distill some of life's most profound and complex experiences with a single image or phrase. Many of her descriptions are so vividly encompassing, they almost seem photographic in quality. It is, perhaps, this masterful economy, this ability to achieve full weight of meaning and vividness with a mere handful of words, that best illustrates her poetic genius. In addition, Sappho has been rightfully praised for the euphony of her verse. Without exception, her words seem to flow with an effortless spontaneity. The melody they create belies any sense of contrivance or artifice. This air of uncalculated fluency is another facet of Sappho's extraordinary artistry.[29] Every line has been arranged to enhance its mellifluous qualities. In the original Greek, word selection, assonance, alliteration, consonantal harmony, vowel repetition and so on are all part of a meticulous orchestration on the poet's part. The result is a poetic *tour de force* whose form and message remains as eloquently compelling today as it was centuries earlier.

At this point, it is necessary to consider a few illustrative examples of Sappho's poetic alchemy. In the *Ode to Aphrodite*, Sappho attempts to enlist the aid of the goddess in an unrequited amorous exploit that has caused much distress. In the process of entreating the immortal daughter of Zeus, she invokes many of the traditional Hellenic *topoi* regarding love. In the opening line, for example, she describes Aphrodite as *doloplokos*, a "weaver of wiles," and pleads that she not overpower her heart with pain and anguish. Instead, she asks that Aphrodite once again depart her father's golden house and come to earth and assist her in her passionate quest. Sappho reminisces about how, in times past, the goddess has appeared with a smiling face to ask, "Whom am I to persuade this time to lead you back to her love?" This is the enlistment

sought by Sappho as she attempts to recruit "Lady Love" as a "fellow fighter" in her amatory cause. What the poem offers, among other things, is a charming self-portrait of the frequency with which our poetess finds herself the plaything of love's cunning game. Significantly, Sappho does not request immunity from these febrile episodes. Rather, she wants to fully explore and experience a love reciprocated and fulfilled. To her credit, Sappho fully grasps love's dialectical qualities. She knows, as all lovers eventually come to know, that attaining the prize necessarily involves vulnerability, discouragement, and anxiety. In short, she appreciates the fact that love's true essence is always an amalgam of joy and agony. In fact, Sappho created a neologism expressly designed to convey this insight. The Greek term is *glupkupikron* meaning, "bittersweet" (see fr. 130).

One of Sappho's most famous poems is fragment 16, a versified meditation on the aesthetic. The song begins with an implied question—"what is beauty?"—followed by a roster of possible responses. Some would say a host of cavalry or a well-arrayed infantry formation was the most beautiful thing in the world. Others might argue that a perfectly ordered fleet of ships was the most compelling sight a person could behold. In truth, Sappho abruptly asserts, none of these images are correct. The most beautiful thing in the world is whatever a person loves. As proof of this premise, the poetess offers the example of Helen of Troy. Captivated by beauty, Helen rejected her noble husband, abandoned her child, and deserted her parents as she sailed off to Ilium. Against the allure of beauty, kith and kin meant nothing to her, and so it is with all those who wear the welt of love's sting. At this point, Sappho is reminded of her own beloved, Anactoria, who is now but a painfully distant memory. In her view, the fluid gait and gleaming sparkle of Anactoria's face is more lovely than any configuration of Lydian chariots because, concerning matters of love, the heart always speaks with ultimate authority.

A final demonstration of Sappho's poetic proficiency is contained in fragment 31,[30] a poem that greatly impressed Longinus,[31] who, in his work *On the Sublime* (10.10), lauds its ingenuity at blending the incongruous emotions evoked by love's madness. Sappho begins by presenting a scene in which two people sit opposite each other. The male figure is described as "fortunate as the gods" for the opportunity to hear the sweet voice and lovely laughter of the maiden he faces. Apparently, however, the man is not particularly impressed with his stroke of good luck. But for her part, the poet is powerfully shaken by the sight of the young woman. Her heart trembles with amorous urges as she lapses into a debilitating swoon. Numbed by her longing, Sappho finds her normal sensory and communicative functions in a state of collapse. She can no longer speak, her eyes have glazed to the point of blindness, and

her ears report nothing but a dull hum. In addition, a strange tingling sensation sweeps over her body as she finds herself drenched in sweat. She summarizes this state of altered consciousness by likening it to a near-death experience. Still, the poem ends with an affirmation that even a discomposure as powerful as this must be endured — such is the price of love.

Rarely have the sweet torments of love been expressed more poignantly than in this delightful little fragment. In a mere sixteen lines, Sappho manages to dissect much of love's mysterious complexity. On the one hand, she carefully gauges the oppressive, afflictive quality of love: how a moment's glance can completely disorder the normal rhythms of life. On the other hand, she tacitly acknowledges that we are not only helpless against love's bewitching charms, we also long to embrace them because we intuitively recognize the zest and savor with which love seasons our lives. For all its disruptive mischief, then, love remains an indispensable imperative of the human drama.

Sexual Identity

Thus far we have restricted our analysis to the cultural environment in which the songstress operated and to her many virtuosities as a poet. We have yet to address the so-called "Sapphic question" — was Sappho a lesbian? In geographic terms, of course, Sappho was most certainly a "Lesbian" (i.e., a native daughter of the island of Lesbos). The issue here, however, is not one of locale but of sexual orientation. Was Sappho a lesbian in the modern sense of the word? Perhaps the most useful way to approach this question is to review the testimony of the extant ancient literature and then to consider the nature of Sappho's *thiasos*, the "community" of young maidens that is said to have operated under her supervision.

To many modern lesbians and feminists, there is no issue here at all. In their view, Sappho was a homoerotic woman who engaged in numerous love affairs with the young women of her poetic circle. So viewed, Sappho has become a kind of iconic symbol for a wide variety of gay and feminist causes. Indeed, in the 1970s, efforts were actually made in Yellow Springs, Ohio, to replicate a Sapphic community — a modern Lesbian *thiasos*.[32] Unfortunately, the evidence for Sappho's homoerotic inclinations is not nearly as concrete as some have argued. In terms of her own poetry, there are some interesting references that suggest homosexual liaisons. In fragment 94, for instance, Sappho speaks of a most painful parting between herself and another woman. The language is tender and loving and suggests powerful romantic attachment. At one point the poem states that, "on soft beds you would satisfy your longing." Similarly, fragment 99 contains a reference to a sexual device often associated

with lesbian love-making.[33] While references such as these are highly suggestive, they hardly constitute definitive evidence.

What, then, of ancient commentary? How was Sappho seen by other poets and critics in antiquity? One important potential evidentiary source is the comedic stage of classical Athens, where sexual ribaldry, in all its forms, was a stock feature of virtually every production. Surely Aristophanes, that master of masculine imagery, would have satirized Sappho and her female associates had there been any indication of female homoeroticism among the Lesbians. Significantly, Aristophanes does use the verb *lesbiazein*, but the term does not relate to homosexuality. Rather, it specifically refers to fellatio. Fourth-century comedic authors also mention Sappho and the Lesbian women but their amorous activities are consistently portrayed as heterosexual. We must conclude, then, that among the ancient Greeks most closely tied to Sappho chronologically, there was no identification of her as a "lesbian" in the modern sense. What the evidence suggests is that it was not until Roman times that Sappho became an icon of female homosexuality and we can specifically identify several key works in this regard, such as Ovid's (1st century A.D.) *The Heroides* and *The Art of Love* and Lucian's (2nd century A.D.) *Dialogues of the Courtesans*. In *The Heroides* (201–2), for example, Sappho is heard to say in a letter written to Phaon that she loved Lesbian daughters to her own "reproach," and in the *Art of Love* (3.331), Ovid asks in regard to Sappho, "Who [was] more wanton than she?" Similar imagery is also expressed, although not applied specifically to Sappho, in Lucian's work (5.2), where women who desire other women as men desire women, are uniquely linked to the island of Lesbos.[34] From this point on, the alleged affections of Sappho, and of Lesbian women in general, became part of conventional belief.[35] In the modern era, these notions were revived by the discovery (in the 14th century) of Ovid's letter between Sappho and Phaon. In all likelihood, it is this fictional correspondence that is chiefly responsible for modernity's belief in Sappho's homosexuality.

It is time now to consider the company of young women that Sappho is said to have directed. Perhaps here we will discover more definitive evidence of the poetess' sexual orientation. The exact nature of this gynarchic association remains open to debate. Some have argued that the Sapphic circle was religious in nature and that Sappho functioned as a priestess devoted to Aphrodite. Another view suggests that Sappho supervised a chorus of *parthenoi* (maidens), instructing them in the arts of song and dance much as Alcman did among the young women of Sparta. Finally, there is the view that Sappho ran a kind of girls' academy, a finishing school for aristocratic maidens, where the soon-to-be-wed received instruction in the moral, social, and artistic graces of the

times. The fact that we are not even certain as to the nature of Sappho's *thiasos* suggests yet another impasse in our efforts to determine the sexual orientation of the poetess and her followers. There is, however, one bit of information that may lend tentative support to the idea of lesbian love relationships between Sappho and various members of her troupe. It comes from Plutarch (admittedly a late source), who, in his discussion of the life of Lycurgus (8.9), mentions a feminine counterpart to the practice of pederasty. In other words, just as men and boys were affiliated in an educational relationship that could include sexual liaisons, women, too, were known to engage in analogous relationships. Arrangements such as these at archaic Sparta certainly leave open the possibility of pederastic ties among the women of Lesbos.

In sum, the issue of Sappho's sexual orientation remains uncertain. Perhaps the best testimony for her homoeroticism is found in a few highly suggestive images in the surviving poems, which, taken together with the pederastic traditions of the ancient Greeks, suggest a real possibility of "lesbianism" in the modern sense. Still, the evidence, in and of itself, does not conclusively prove homosexual activity on Sappho's part. In the final analysis, therefore, the "Sapphic question" remains open.

Legacy

Although Sappho's sexual identity remains uncertain, there is no doubt as to the remarkable impact this honey-voiced songstress had upon the Western poetic tradition. In antiquity, for example, Roman poets such as Catullus and Horace copied her works freely.[36] According to Bruno Gentili, Sappho also played a significant role in shaping medieval Europe's notions of courtly love. At the same time, Sappho's emphasis on the reciprocity and irrefusability of love helped inform Christian ideas of man's obligation to requite the affections of the loving God.[37] In the modern era Sappho's style, imagery, and name occur repeatedly in the works of many noted literary figures. Among the French, for instance, Racine incorporates some of her poetry in his *Phèdre*. Sappho's influence can also be traced in the works of Madame de Staël and Chateaubriand. The list of British authors who wrote about Sappho and employed her verse in their own compositions is remarkable and includes the likes of John Donne, Alexander Pope, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and Lord Byron. Among American writers, Edgar Allan Poe alludes to Sappho in his *To Sarah* and again in *Al Aaraaf* and T.S. Eliot used her fragments in the construction of *The Waste Land*. In addition, Sappho's works have played an impressive role in the operatic productions of many Italian, French, German, Dutch, and Russian authors.

Finally, as one might expect, Sappho has long been a source of inspiration among many female poets. The roster of women who have written in the shadow of our ancient poetess includes, among others, Emily Dickinson, Amy Lowell, Gertrude Stein, Adrienne Rich, Hilda Doolittle, Audre Lorde, Olga Broumas, Paula Gunn Allen, and Judy Grahn. Within this community of belletrists, Sappho has served not only as a model lyricist but also as a symbol of feminine assertion — as a heroine in the cause of equality and freedom of expression. In light of all this, it seems safe to say that not even the passage of another 2,600 years will dim the timeless essence of Sappho's song.

Notes

1. In addition, we know of a portrait of her dedicated on the Athenian Acropolis and of a statue raised in her honor at Syracuse.

2. This chronology is derived from the 10th-century literary encyclopedia known as the *Suda*, which claims Sappho was born at the time of the 42nd Olympiad (612–608 B.C.).

3. The name assigned Sappho's husband may reflect the ribaldry of Middle Comedy. "Cercylas from the island of Andros" translates as "prick from the island of man."

4. A marble slab found on the island of Paros with a chronological table dating events from the reign of the mythical Athenian king Cecrops to 263 B.C.

5. The six comedic authors who wrote plays about Sappho are Ameipsias, Amphis, Antiphanes, Diphilus, Ephippus, and Timocles.

6. Few voices among the ancient Greeks endorsed love. Empedocles (495–435 B.C.) was a rare exception. He described love (*philia*) as a positive cosmic force responsible for harmony and joy. Another affirmative assessment is offered by Plato in the *Symposium*, where love is presented as the energy by which men may come to grasp the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. Even here, however, Plato acknowledges the reprobative potential of love, as indicated by Pausanias' remarks on the *eros pandemos* and by the besotted confessions of Alcibiades (215–19d).

7. The Euripidean model was, for example, continued by Virgil in his portrayal of Dido (see *Aeneid*, Book 4).

8. It seems only three goddesses were capable of resisting love's seductions — Athena, Artemis, and Hestia.

9. See *Iliad* 20.268–70.

10. See *Charmides* 155d–e. One should also compare these descriptions with the analysis of *epithumia* offered by Plato in *Republic*, Book 4.

11. See 4.37.80.

12. The Greek term for this much-admired capacity was *sophrosyne*, or temperance.

13. Oppression of the feminine was apparently less severe in archaic times than in the classical era, as illustrated by Homer's portraits of women such as Queen Arete, Andromache, and Penelope. In addition, the legal code of Gortyn suggests the Dorian Greeks of Crete and Sparta may have had somewhat more enlightened attitudes toward women (e.g., an allowance for the ownership of property).

14. See Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 1.5.22 and W. Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 51.

15. To put it in terms made famous by Claude Lévi-Strauss, the feminine principle represents the "raw," while the masculine norm signifies the "cooked" (i.e., the civilized).

16. See also *Works and Days* 373–75.

17. A similar scheme is also presented by the poet Phocylides (c. 540 B.C.), who describes four types within the tribe of woman — the bitch, the sow, the mare, and the bee.

18. The proper demeanor for a woman is expressed by Ismene in Sophocles' *Antigone* (61–62), who reminds her sister, "We were born women, showing that we were not meant to fight with men."

19. The idea of formal, state-sponsored management of women received concrete expression under the leadership of the Athenian statesman, Demetrius of Phalerum (late 4th century B.C.), who established a board of *gynaikonomoi*, or "regulators of women."

20. Not all the philosophers were as negative toward women as Aristotle. Plato, for example, insists that women should be educated in the same manner as men (*Laws* 7.804e) and places women among his guardians in *Republic* (540c). However, even Plato is not above defaming women — see *Timaeus* 42b.

21. Perhaps the best way to summarize Greek medical theory's attitudes toward feminine psychology is to consider the etymology of our word "hysteria," which in Greek means "womb."

22. In Athens a woman could not buy or sell land and could only become involved in contracts amounting to less than one *medimnus*— a measure of grain that might sustain a family unit for six days' time.

23. A rare exception was certain religious rites such as the *Thesmophoira*, a three-day festival in which women (non-virgins) were allowed a significant degree of independence.

24. White skin indicated a woman spent her time indoors rather than gallivanting about. The Greek term was *skiatrophia*, or "living in the dark."

25. This song could also be accompanied by a variety of other stringed instruments such as the magadis, kitharis, barbiton, or phorminx.

26. Choral lyric tended to be more artificial linguistically, and it relied heavily upon the Doric dialect.

27. The *Ode to Aphrodite* was discovered quoted in full by Dionysius of Halicarnassus in his *On Literary Composition.*

28. The Greek term means "at the bedroom," and Sappho was the first to convert these ribald tunes into an elevated literary form (see fragment 44). The most famous surviving examples of this hymeneal poetry are Catullus' poems 61 and 62, which clearly reveal Sapphic influence.

29. For example: "Love shook my heart like a wind falling on oaks on a mountain"; "You came, and I was longing for you; you cooled my heart which was burning with desire"; and "Come, divine lyre, speak to me and find yourself a voice."

30. This poem is directly reprised in Catullus' poem 51.

31. Longinus was a 1st-century A.D. literary critic.

32. See J.M. Snyder, *Lesbian Desire in the Lyrics of Sappho* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 124.

33. The Greek term is *olisbos*, meaning "dildo."

34. The Greek word for such a woman was *tribas*, meaning "one who rubs." This is the origin of modern terms such as "tribadism" and "tribadic love."

35. This is not to suggest that Sappho was without defenders, both ancient and modern. Aelian and Athenaeus, for example, sought to exonerate the songstress by claiming a case of mistaken identity (i.e., there were two Sapphos — one a poet, the other a courtesan). More recently, a spirited defense of Sappho was offered by D.M. Robinson in *Sappho and Her Influence* (1924), although his arguments are of dubious merit.

36. Catullus' poem 51, for instance, is a direct imitation of Sappho's fragment 31.

37. See Gentili, *Poetry and it's Public in Ancient Greece*, trans. A.T. Cole (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 82.

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5

Pythagoras (Mid-500s–496 B.C.)

Mystic Mathematician

In the opinion of many experts, Pythagoras merits a special place in the pantheon of great Western thinkers. W.K.C. Guthrie, for instance, describes him as one of the most original minds in history and designates him the father of mathematical science. W.P.D. Wightman similarly maintains that Pythagoras' identification of "number" as *ousia*, the universal substrate of all existence, forever altered the course of human history. These assessments are also shared by Bertrand Russell, who without qualification proclaimed Pythagoras one of the most important men who ever lived. Modern tributes such as these are exceeded only by the praise heaped upon Pythagoras in antiquity. According to Heraclides Ponticus, Pythagoras was the first to invent and define the term "philosophy." He was also credited with having coined the word "cosmos," one of the most seminal concepts in the history of Greek thought. His mathematical prowess was, of course, legendary among the ancients, and he was assigned a variety of discoveries in this field including the theorem that bears his name[1] as well as the numerical ratios underlying the intervals of the musical scale. Indeed, Aristoxenos argued that Pythagoras was the first to approach mathematics in a genuinely scientific manner, a view later seconded by Proclus in his treatise on Euclid. In addition, Pythagoras was seen as a great spiritual teacher who promoted the theory of metempsychosis and established a religio-philosophic brotherhood at Croton.

Just who was this remarkable man, and how credible are the many achievements attributed to him? Answering this question is no easy task given the deficient state of the ancient sources. Fortunately, an invaluable service has been rendered in this regard by Walter Burkert in his foundational study, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism* (1972). The key points of Burkert's findings are these: Diogenes Laertius (2.8.6) notwithstanding, scholars believe

Pythagoras wrote nothing, which means we must rely exclusively upon dubious secondary sources; the most credible material we possess are the surviving fragments of Philolaus, a Pythagorean and contemporary of Socrates[2]; a great deal of the extant literature is heavily contaminated by Platonic elements which say far more about Plato and his disciplines at the Old Academy (Speusippus, Xenocrates, Heraclitus) than about Pythagoras and his followers; the later sources are highly hagiographic and as such tend to reflect an irresistible enthusiasm for the marvelous.

These points illustrate the ultimate impossibility of creating any authentic portrait of Pythagoras and his accomplishments. There is virtually no documentation available from the period of Pythagoras' lifetime, and the later sources we do possess are as extravagant in details as they are poor in legitimate evidence, more committed to venerative embellishment than to anything resembling credible reporting. For these reasons, we must speak of "Pythagoras" in very general terms, acknowledging the literature's indiscriminate tendency to assign the "master" personal responsibility for every discovery and accomplishment — despite the fact that Pythagoreanism enjoyed a 1,000 year-history. With these precautions firmly in mind, we can attempt a brief summary of Pythagoras' life. He was born in Samos in the mid–6th century B.C. but left his native land around 530 to avoid the oppressions of Polycrates' tyranny. Pythagoras resettles in southern Italy — first at Croton and later at Metapontum. While at Croton, he reportedly established a coed "community" strongly resembling a religious cult. During this period, Croton attained great power and was able to destroy its archrival, the opulent city-state of Sybaris. Political animosities led to violence against the Pythagorean brotherhood around 510 B.C., which prompted Pythagoras' relocation to Metapontum, where he died in 496. A second assault against the order probably occurred in the mid–5th century, sparing only a few members, such as Lysis and Philolaus. Some years later the society is said to have revived at Tarentum, where Archytus, a Pythagorean philosopher and mathematician, was elected *strategos* (general) seven times.[3]

Most of these details seem plausible enough, but there is also a thick, obfuscating layer of lore and legend surrounding our philosopher. One of the more prevalent images, for instance, depicts Pythagoras as a Hellenic shaman,[4] a kind of mystagogic miracle worker capable of bilocation, healings, prophecy, power over animals, and even descent into Hades (*katabasis*). Attributions such as these linked Pythagoras to other preternatural types such as Arabis, Epimenides, and Hermotimus, but the sanctification of his name and reputation did not stop there. Eventually the ancient sources came to portray Pythagoras as something more than merely human. Some texts describe him

as a *daimon* in the Platonic sense of the word, meaning intermediary between god and man. Other sources present him in fully divinized terms, specifically as an incarnation of the Hyperborean Apollo.

How does a mathematician become an object of deification? The answer lies in the fact that Pythagoras was not simply a "scientist" in any modern sense of the term. The mathematical instruction attributed to him, for example, is as much metaphysical as it is scientific. We are told, for example, that Pythagoras was a practitioner of an arithmetic mysticism in which certain numbers enjoyed occult properties.[5] In addition, Pythagoras' reported belief in the transmigration of souls, which included detailed recollection of his own prior incarnations,[6] almost certainly contributed to his reputation as a superhuman being. Finally, the community he is credited with founding, a kind of Hellenic Freemasonry, had all the trappings of a religious order, including a prolonged novitiate silence, dietary instructions, esoteric rites and rituals, and the use of *symbola* (secret passwords/phrases).[7] Here, Pythagoras is described in hierophantic terms, as a holy man of such lofty stature that the faithful were loath to utter his name directly, electing instead to describe him simply as the "master." In short, the ancient commentators present Pythagoras as an amalgam of scientific insight and spiritual intuition — part Albert Einstein, part Mary Baker Eddy.[8]

In terms of his scientific achievements, Pythagoras is credited with three major innovations: the discovery of the numerical ratios determining the concordant intervals of the musical scale; a revolutionary cosmology identifying mathematics as the language and substance of reality; and a new celestial alignment precursory of modern heliocentrism. The first achievement, a recognition of how numbers bring order and beauty to discordant sound, was first attributed to Pythagoras by Porphyry, a late Neoplatonic source. Others, such as Archytus (late 5th to early 4th century B.C.), assigned the achievement to a Pythagorean disciple, Hippasus of Metapontum.[9] At first glance, the discovery that the octave depends upon a ratio of 2:1, the fifth on the ratio of 3:2, and the fourth on the ratio 4:3 might seem like little more than esoteric minutiae. In truth, however, it may have had a profound effect upon the history of Western thought to the extent that numerical foundations of the musical scale encouraged the Pythagoreans to conclude "all things are numbers" — in other words, numbers were the ontological substrate of the universe (see below).[10] The key sources in this regard are a few surviving fragments from Philolaus and a scattering of remarks contained in the Aristotelian corpus (especially *Metaphysics*, *Physic*, and *On the Heavens*). According to Philolaus, the universe is harmonious and orderly because the fundamental building blocks of existence, the Limited and the Unlimited, were productively

joined by numbers. In other words, numbers are the source of cosmic harmony, without which there would be not only an all-embracing chaos but also a corresponding incapacity of man to fathom the world because "number is the cause of recognition, able to give guidance and teaching to every man in what is puzzling and unknown" (Diels, fr. 11). In addition, there is evidence to suggest the Pythagoreans extended their mathematical theories to explain the existence of specific physical objects — a premise met with considerable derision by Aristotle, who employs the Categories and his concept of substance to discredit such thinking. How, Aristotle asks, can numbers possess magnitude? How can sensibles be derived from abstract mathematical category? In the end, Aristotle argues, the dubious appeal to analogies and mystical imagery in the form of numbers made by the Pythagoreans is no substitute for proof. According to Aristotle, Pythagoras, and/or his disciples, failed to appreciate the distinction between formal and material causation and, as a result, they had manufactured a description of Being defiant of reality (*Meta.* 14.3.4).

Pythagoras is also credited with a variety of impressive achievements in the area of astronomy. Here again a key figure appears to be Philolaus, who may be responsible for many of the theories attributed to the "master." Among other things, Pythagoras is said to have been the first to insist the earth was not a flat disk but rather a sphere rotating on its own axis. Above all, he and/or his followers were responsible for deposing the earth from its magisterial rest at the center of the universe. In doing so, they declared the earth a *planetes*, or "wanderer," which, along with the other nine heavenly bodies, orbited a central fire known as the "hearth of the universe."[11] The historical significance of these revolutionary views cannot be overstated, for they led directly to the advanced theories of Aristarchus of Samos and the fully developed heliocentrism of Copernicus, who specifically acknowledged Philolaus as an important predecessor. In addition, later Pythagoreans were responsible for one of the more picturesque theories in the history of astronomy — the Harmony of the Spheres. On the model of the musical intervals, the Pythagoreans concluded that the distances separating the ten celestial spheres corresponded with the ratios of the musical scale, producing a supernal symphony determined by the speed and size of the orbits. To modern ears the notion of a musical score embedded in the heavenly firmament may appear childish but this feature of Pythagorean astronomy proved remarkably resilient and continued to excite the imaginations of thinkers such as Johannes Kepler as late as the 17th century.[12]

Given our knowledge of Pythagoras and the movement that took his name, it is essential that our analysis of his legacy include the two domains that jointly lent Pythagoreanism its unique stamp — the mystical and the

rational. Concerning the former, Pythagoras' conception of the philosophic life extended beyond an intellectual mastery of recondite teachings, including a kind of pneumatic discipline. In the fullest sense of the term, philosophy was, for the Pythagoreans, a conversionary exercise that propelled the soul toward its ultimate destiny.[13] This view, and a series of related ideas, is strongly redolent of Orphism, and scholars have long noted the affinities between Pythagoreanism and the mystery religion. There is, however, one distinguishing feature of Pythagoreanism: a reliance upon the mathematical sciences as a means of promoting human spirituality. In addition to their many religious prescriptions, the Pythagoreans believed a regimen of mathematical studies played an essential part in the soul's purification. In combining mathematics and theology, thus designating reason and religion as partners in man's spiritual progress, the Pythagoreans infused the Western religious tradition with a rational dimension that continues to differentiate it from the ecstatic mysticism of the Eastern faiths. In this sense, the Pythagoreans merit much of the credit for that dynamic tension between faith and reason that uniquely characterizes so much of Western religious history.

Without question, the Pythagoreans' mathematical legacy is the most readily acknowledged aspect of their contributions to Western culture — every school child knows of the Pythagorean theorem. Few, however, are aware of the fact that this famous formula was not actually "discovered" by Pythagoras. In truth, the law eventually codified by Pythagoras was already being applied by the Babylonians as early as the 18th century B.C. What Mesopotamian science failed to do, and what Pythagoras accomplished, was to formulate this and other mathematical findings into a proof-driven system. The Babylonians were master tabulators who meticulously organized enormous amounts of numerical information, but not a single general law has been found anywhere in their compilations. Indeed, even the use of analogy rarely occurs in the surviving record. In contrast, the Pythagoreans took it upon themselves to analyze numbers, making them an object of scholarly research pursued not for its potential utility but as an object of "pure" deductive inquiry. In the end, this unprecedented move not only redirected the spirit and substance of mathematical investigation, it also contributed to a general scientific spirit uniquely characteristic of Western culture.

Pythagoreanism also played an important role in astronomy's revolutionary advances during the 16th and 17th centuries. Bolstered by the authority of Aristotle and Ptolemy, the geocentric system remained an unassailable orthodoxy for centuries. The notion of earthly centrality was reinforced further by the Church's aggressive promotion of geocentrism as an official article of faith. Needless to say, the combined might of philosophical tradition and reli-

gious dogma greatly minimized opportunities for fresh thinking in this matter. Although it was very slow in arriving, change did come in the 16th century via the theories of Nicolaus Copernicus, the father of modern heliocentrism. As a student, Copernicus pursued a variety of subject areas, including medicine, mathematics, and ancient Greek. His proficiency in the latter was such that he could read the ancient texts in the original language. In a dedicatory letter to Pope Paul II appended to his *On the Revolution of Heavenly Spheres* (1543), Copernicus describes how he first came to consider a heliocentric system. He explains that while reading Plutarch,[14] he encountered a reference to the Philolaic system — the idea that the earth was not a static body located at the center of the universe but rather a planet revolving around a great central fire. This was the stimulus acknowledged by Copernicus that led to that momentous alteration we associate with his name — a shift that not only ended a naïve anthropomorphism but also heralded the birth of modern scientific astronomy.

The final feature of the Pythagorean legacy involves an immensely suggestive understanding of the natural realm. The enigma and complexity of nature — its "love" of hiding, as Heraclitus said — was fully acknowledged by the ancient Greeks. Yet from the outset, their investigations were driven by a conviction that beneath the world's ostensive chaos, law and meaning prevailed.[15] The Pythagoreans also subscribed to these beliefs, agreeing that nature, for all her complexity, was nevertheless governed by an inner logic and that logic was understood as fundamentally mathematical. This accounts for the Pythagorean assertion that the universe was a unified and harmonious system subject to human analysis and comprehension. Empowered by the revelatory gifts of mathematics, the Pythagoreans believed men were uniquely able to lift the veil of nature's many mysteries.

As we have seen, the Pythagorean adoration of numbers included a variety of metaphysical elements — for them mathematics was not simply a science, it was a sacred instrument with an almost mystical capacity to unmask and decipher. Still, the Pythagorean penchant for hermeticism should not discredit the significance of their cosmological premise — that mathematics was the universal language of nature and that no proper understanding of the world could be obtained without appeal to numbers. Today, modern science affirms this seminal insight by routinely converting natural phenomena (e.g., velocity, mass, heat, light, etc.) into numerical formats. To the extent, then, that we have made mathematics the *lingua franca* of our scientific enterprise, to the degree we rely upon numbers as a means of exploring and decoding the rhythms of our world, we are in fact following a path first trod by the "master" of Croton and his arithmetically inspired disciples.

Notes

1. The Pythagorean theorem states that the square of the length of the hypotenuse of a right triangle is equal to the sum of the squares of the lengths of the other two sides. In equation form, it reads as follows: $c^2 = a^2 + b^2$.

2. Another reasonably credible source of information about Pythagoreanism is the works of Aristotle, especially *Metaphysics* and *On the Heavens*. Unfortunately, his full treatise on the sect has been lost.

3. This is the same Archytus, of whom Plato speaks in the *Seventh Epistle* and who may have served as Plato's model for the philosopher-king.

4. For the possible influence of shamanism upon Greek religious belief, see the works of Karl Meuli and E.R. Dodds.

5. For example, the number 3 represented wholeness, 4 equaled justice, 5 symbolized marriage, 7 implied opportunity, and 10 was indicative of perfection. Some numbers were also specifically linked to certain deities. According to the Pythagoreans, the number 7 had special affinities with the goddess Athena.

6. There were various lists compiled in antiquity tracing the reincarnations of Pythagoras. One of the more complete rosters is offered by Diogenes Laertius (8.4–5). Among his many lives, Pythagoras claimed to have been Euphorbus, a warrior who fought at Troy and was wounded by Menelaus.

7. Iamblichus tells us there were two subgroups within the Pythagorean order — the *acusmatici* and the *mathematici*. The former were ascetics who sought a life of righteousness in accordance with Pythagorean precepts. The latter were the scientific mathematicians who comprised the community's core membership.

8. This comparison belongs to Bertrand Russell.

9. Hippasus is portrayed as a renegade member of the Pythagorean sect guilty of mathematical treason for having revealed either the secret of irrational numbers or the mystery of the dodecahedron. The gods reportedly repaid his treachery with shipwreck and drowning.

10. Another view suggests the Pythagoreans arrived at this conclusion as a result of their tendency to represent numbers geometrically, as illustrated by the figure known as the *tetractys* (four group), composed of the numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4 and arranged in a pebble figure as a "perfect" triangle (see below).

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11. The ten heavenly bodies described by the Pythagoreans were the fixed stars: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, Mercury, the Sun, the Moon, Earth, and the *antichthon* (counter-earth). Aristotle decried the counter-earth as a Pythagorean contrivance aimed at achieving the "perfect" number 10 (*On the Heavens* 2.13.25).

12. The key text in this regard is Kepler's *Harmonice Mundi* (1619).

13. Later Pythagoreans believed the goal of man's soul involved an attunement with the cosmic order — a harmonization of microcosm and macrocosm.

14. Specifically, Pseudo-Plutarch's *De Placitis Philosophorum* 3.13.

15. See also the chapter on Thales.

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6

Parmenides (Born c. 515 B.C.)

Father of Metaphysics and Logic

Parmenides has been described as the most important of all Presocratic thinkers,[1] the man who single-handedly redirected the trajectory of Hellenic speculation and set the terms and conditions under which subsequent thinkers such as Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Leucippus, and Democritus were to operate. In more general terms, Parmenides has been hailed as the initiating figure of the Western philosophic tradition, a distinction accorded him in part because he was the first to think about thinking (i.e., the first to bring a meta-analysis to the process of human knowing). In addition, Parmenides has been credited with originating the foundation of Western ontology as well as having advanced a nascent system of deductive proofs that supplied the essential groundwork for logic.[2] Monumental achievements such as these explain the reverential manner with which the ancients referred to Parmenides. Plato, for example, invokes laudatory tones reminiscent of Homer, describing him as "venerable and awful" (*Theat.* 183e).[3]

Although many details are uncertain, we know that Parmenides was born at Elea, a Phocaean colony located on the southwest coast of Italy (Magna Graecia). A good deal of chronology relating to Parmenides is based on the introductory passages of a Platonic dialogue named for the philosopher. It describes an alleged meeting between an aged Parmenides, his disciple Zeno and "a very young Socrates." According to Plato, the Elean master was 65 years old at the time. If we assume the "young" Socrates mentioned in the dialogue was roughly 20 years of age, the events depicted in Plato's work would have occurred around 450 B.C. Using Socrates' date of birth as a benchmark allows us to calculate Parmenides' approximate date of birth as 515 B.C. This dating has also been used to gauge the period when Parmenides may have composed his seminal poem, *On Nature* (about 485 B.C.).

In terms of socioeconomic status, Parmenides was a man of noble birth and considerable resource. Speusippus tells us that he served his native city as legislator, an activity generally reserved for men of substance. During his formative years, the ancient sources suggest Parmenides studied under a variety of noted mentors, including Anaximander, Xenophanes, and a Pythagorean named Ameinias, to whom Parmenides dedicated a sanctuary in gratitude.[4] Parmenides is known to have had two noted disciples: Zeno, who was famous for his paradoxical defenses of the masters' teachings, and the Samian general Melissus, who famously defeated Pericles in a naval battle in 441 B.C.

What we presume to know about Parmenidean philosophy is derived chiefly from 154 lines of hexameter verse written in a style strongly evocative of Homeric and Hesiodic poetry.[5] As is so often the case with Presocratic interpretation, the meager remains at our disposal have nevertheless spawned a volume of disparate interpretation completely out of proportion to the surviving fragments. This incongruency is particularly acute in Parmenides' case for several reasons. For one thing, much of the poem reads like oracular tautology, which means scholars and commentators have been granted license to "discover" any number of arcane meanings. For example, a natural reading of the poem suggests that Parmenides was a monist, but how is that term to be applied? Was he a numerical monist (i.e., did Parmenides believe there was only one thing, ontologically speaking?)[6] Was Parmenides a material monist, arguing that everything came originally from some universal substrate (e.g. water or air)? Or was he perhaps advancing a form of predicational monism — a monism relating to natures and essences?[7]

A closely related area of contention concerns the use and meaning of *einai*, the Greek verb "to be." In the Parmenidean sentence, "It Is and It cannot be," the subject is not specified and remains fundamentally ambiguous. Is Parmenides using "is" in an existential sense, a predicative sense, or a veridical sense? Has he confuted or conflated the existential and predicative meanings, creating in the process an obscurity of legendary proportions?[8] In addition to these questions, the surviving text also bristles with a variety of more mundane difficulties, including sentence structure, word order, vocabulary, and sentence placement.

Compounding matters further is the controversy concerning the relationship of the poem's internal units. As it has come down to us, *On Nature* is comprised of three sections — an allegorical prologue, the Way of Truth (*Aletheia*), and the Way of Opinion (Doxa). Above all, it is the so-called *Doxa*, both its meaning and its relationship to the rest of the poem, that has stirred endless controversy among scholars. Is it to be understood dialectically (i.e., as a criticism of earlier cosmologists)? Is it intended simply as a running cat-

alogue of previous speculation?[9] Is it an Elean rendering of some particular school of thought, such as Pythagoreanism? Or is it perhaps a serious attempt on Parmenides' part to register his own views regarding the realm of sense by offering a series of empirical countersigns distinct from the necessities of Pure Being (i.e., a reasonable, but admittedly deficient, description of the sensory realm where "truth" remains forever elusive)?[10] Unfortunately, it seems even the most rigorous reading of *On Nature* is unlikely to resolve these points definitively, much less a host of other vexing questions.

On Nature

The poem begins with a description of a mystical conveyance whereby Parmenides is brought from the Palace of Night to a new realm of "light."[11] The mode of transport is a chariot drawn by "exceedingly intelligent mares" and steered by the daughters of the sun, who bring our poet to the gates of the paths of Night and Day. There, the goddess of justice is persuaded by the sun maidens to swing back the gates and allow the chariot to proceed. The goddess receives Parmenides generously, taking his hand and advising him that the path he is now on is far from the one normally trod by mankind. In addition, she counsels him to inquire into everything, "both the motionless heart of well-rounded Truth" and the opinion of mortals, "where there is no true reliability." Moreover, Parmenides is admonished to test "the things-that-seem" (*ta dokounta*) as a necessary aspect of this instruction.

There is little question that the proem of *On Nature* announces a journey of mind — a process by which a person might come to attain genuine enlightenment. In addition, it also asserts a powerful dichotomy between Truth and the hopelessly errant assessments of most mortals. In effect, Parmenides is declaring a privileged status for himself. He claims a divinely vouchsafed instruction guaranteed to pierce the veil of human ignorance, an instruction that will allow him to think like God.[12]

As the poem continues, the goddess stipulates two forms of inquiry "which alone are to be thought," plus a third approach unique to the muddled musings of mortals:

> The one that It Is, and it is not possible for It
> Not To Be, is the way of credibility, for it follows Truth;
> the other, that It Is Not, and that It Is bound Not To Be:
> this I tell you is a path that cannot be explored; for you could
> neither recognize that which Is Not, nor express it. (Diels, fr. 2)[13]

The first mode of inquiry acknowledges the logical necessity of existence and constitutes a foundational truth upon which all intelligible knowing must

rely. The second course of inquiry precludes logical consideration because for Parmenides it is impossible to think or speak of Non-being.[14] What the Elean seems to be asserting here is an inextricable relationship between ontology and epistemology — in some sense, thinking and Being are understood as coterminous (fr. 5). In order to think, we must consider that which Is, because thought requires an object, and since Non-being cannot be an object of thought, the second form of inquiry "is a path that cannot be explored." Or, to put it another way, thought without Being is impossible for Parmenides.[15]

In fragment 6 of the poem, the goddess addresses the specific shortcomings that afflict mortal cognition. The description she offers is remarkably condemnatory of the perplexities and inconsistencies that govern the thoughts of humanity. Mortals wander through life in a kind of ruminative fog, leaving them deaf and blind and completely incapable of accurate assessment. As a result, men conduct themselves in the manner of "uncritical hordes." They proceed in a "two-headed" manner (i.e., they are of two mutually exclusive minds regarding the fundamental matter of existence). Specifically, their addled reasoning encourages them to assume that "To Be and Not To Be" are the same and not the same and that "in everything there is a way of opposing stress."[16] The goddess pointedly debars her disciple from engaging in such empty-headed absurdity, a prohibition she subsequently reasserts in fragment 7, where the shortcomings of empirical supposition are again censured.

In what amounts to a powerful polemic against the senses, the goddess next admonishes her young charge not to be misled by the seductions of "ordinary experience." Specifically, she warns him against allowing "the eye, sightless as it is, and the ear, full of sound, and the tongue, to rule." In other words, one must guard against the siren song of perception, which misleads men into believing that "that which Is Not" exists. For Parmenides, sense data is a form of non-thinking and is therefore entirely incapable of providing any genuine, consistent, or meaningful conception of reality. Fortunately, humanity has at is disposal a well-founded and authoritative alternative — logos. The goddess instructs that rather than relying upon the mendacious reports of eye, ear, and tongue, one must rely exclusively upon the validating powers of Reason.[17]

After her disparagement of the errant ways of humankind, the goddess presents a lengthy description of the various "sign-posts" characteristic of true Being. For one thing, Existence is ungenerated and indestructible. There can be no genesis for Parmenides because what Is cannot come into Being from what Is Not.[18] Similarly, there is no room for growth, development, or decay in the Elean's scheme. This would assign a partial status to Existence, a kind of ontology by degree. Instead, reality is described as complete and absolute

in itself. Moreover, it is singular, indivisible, homogenous, and completely defiant of any and all change. Parmenides further insists that Being is to be understood as a delimited plenum[19] that precludes both the possibility of void and motion.[20] Empty space must be rejected, according to the tenets of Parmenidean ontology, because "emptiness" implies Non-Being and Non-Being does not exist. In short, Parmenides presents us with a portrait of reality that is eternal, complete, motionless, ubiquitous, immutable, and homogeneous. The contrary notions mortals have falsely applied to Existence — becoming, perishing, not-being, change of position, alteration of color — are merely words entirely devoid of Truth.

At this stage in the poem (the concluding section of fragment 8), the goddess signals a critical demarcation in her teaching: "At this point I cease my reliable Logos and thought, concerning Truth; from here onwards you must learn the opinion of mortals, listening to the deceptive order of my words." Thus begins the so-called Doxa, the meaning and purpose of which remains a source of ongoing scholarly contention, and which will not occupy the current analysis further (see above).

How, then, is one to summarize the sibylline verses of Parmenides? The many obscurities and technical issues notwithstanding, at least this much seems clear. First, Parmenides proffers a deductive meditation on what he sees as the cardinal sin of human understanding — a debilitating penchant to confuse Being and Non-Being. This is the fundamental flaw and obstacle to Truth, a blight of mind that dulls and darkens our capacity to apprehend Reality. The path to this grand obscurity is paved with the deceitful testimonies of the senses and compounded further by the deceptive authority of customary assumption. In response to all this, Parmenides offers a new and higher standard of knowing, one capable of dispelling the mists of falsity and bestowing an irrefragable Truth. This is the second major premise of the poem — man is capable of lifting himself out of the ignorance that defiles intelligence; he is capable of attaining axiomatic insight. In the process of advancing these aspects of his philosophy, Parmenides proceeds to endow Western civilization with the rudiments of its first philosophical method. According to this approach, *ouk esti* (What Is Not) is a distortive category that leads to contradiction and inconsistency because Reality is neither multivalent nor protean. Rather, Being is unitary and unchanging, and it alone can serve as the object of legitimate thought. Here the Elean establishes a critical demarcation that leaves an indelible impression on Western speculation — the distinction between perception and thought, between physics and metaphysics. The human mind, according to Parmenides, can make no claim to certainty as long as it relies upon illusory and transitory data. What must

be sought instead is a coherent and logically necessary understanding of Reality that allows mortals to certify their professions of Truth. In short, Parmenides promotes the laws of thought as an antidote to the pseudo-laws of sense. In effect, he prescribes a sojourn of mind where human understanding attains a purity and perfection consistent with the divine revelations described in *The Way of Truth*.[21]

The Parmenidean Legacy

Assessing the significance of Parmenides' achievement is by no means an easy task. For one thing, we are strongly inclined to dismiss much of what he says (e.g., regarding genesis, plurality, motion, and change) as impossible nonsense. The modern mind has become powerfully allied to empirical categories and as a result our first reaction to Eleaticism is not dissimilar to Antisthenes' response to Zeno: we are inclined simply to stand up and walk away.[22] If, however, we move beyond our perceptually driven assumptions and take a moment to consider the historical context in which Parmenides operated, the magnitude of the Elean's achievement becomes more and more apparent. As difficult as it may be for us to understand today, some twenty-five hundred years after the fact, Parmenides lived during a time when there were virtually no rules of cognitive engagement. The speculation of mortals, as the poem suggests, was wildly undisciplined. There were no restraining rules of thought, no standards or measures by which to assay the many disparate claims regarding truth and reality. As a result, men were chronically disposed toward a kind of intellectual malpractice, where gross inconsistency and overt contradiction operated with impunity.[23] In response to these dubious conditions, Parmenides proposed a historic and unprecedented solution — the superimposition of Being upon the world of Becoming. According to Parmenides, human thought can only claim substance and validity for itself if it is anchored in Reality. In the absence of such an ontological mooring, the ideas of mortals remain devoid of legitimizing criteria because genuine understanding cannot be obtained by sight, sound, touch, or taste. Only the confluence of Being and mind can result in a legitimate grasp of "well-rounded Truth."[24] In advancing these ideas, Parmenides distinguished himself as a thinker of world-historic significance, specifically as the first to establish the guidelines of logically valid reflection.

The tone and spirit of Parmenides' poem, particularly the prologue, suggest the Elean believed he had discovered, or perhaps had been granted via divine agency, a new and authoritative way of understanding the world. Today we refer to this approach as "rationalism," which asserts that the criteria of

truth lie not in sensory but rather in deductive mechanisms.[25] Parmenides was the founder of this discursive method and as such his poem has been acknowledged as the first work of logic in history. Indeed, a close reading of his cryptic verse reveals many of the nascent elements of a logical system,[26] including the principle of sufficient reason, the rules of contradiction, and the law of the excluded middle. All of these were devised as part of a method aimed at providing demonstrative proof for philosophical claims. Historically speaking, the significance of this achievement proved to be beyond calculation. In its absence, the linguistic experiments of the sophists, the modal logic of Aristotle, the prosleptic syllogisms of Theophrastus, the paradoxes of Eubulides (the Megarian school), and the truth-functional schemata of the Stoic Chrysippus would be impossible to imagine. And while it would be inappropriate to suggest that modern, mathematically based logic is in any direct way indebted to Parmenides, the fact remains that such celebrated figures as Frege, Russell, Whitehead, Carnap, and Gödel all stood on the shoulders of this ancient Elean giant.

Notes

1. J. Barnes states, "Parmenides' influence on later Presocratic thought was all-pervasive" (*The Presocratic Philosophers* [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979], 1:155).

2. A status acknowledged by G.W.F. Hegel: "It is sufficient to mention here, that logic begins where the proper history of philosophy begins. Philosophy began with the Eleatic school, specifically with Parmenides. Parmenides who conceives the absolute as Being, saw that 'Being alone is and nothing is not.' Such was the true starting point of philosophy, which is always knowledge by thought: and here for the first time we find pure thought seized and made an object to itself" (*Logic*, section 86).

3. Plato also describes Parmenides as possessing "a glorious depth of mind" later in the same dialogue.

4. For Parmenides' educational background, see Diogenes Laertius 9.21–23.

5. We are indebted to Sextus Empiricus (c. 2nd century A.D.) and Simplicius (c. 6th century A.D.) for the preservation of Parmenides' poem. The former preserved the proem, while the latter provided extensive extracts in his commentaries on Aristotle's *Physics* and *On the Heavens.*

6. This is the traditional view attributed to Parmenides, which Aristotle dismissed as "almost madness" in his *Coming to Be and Passing Away* (1.8).

7. This position has been advanced by P. Curd; see *The Legacy of Parmenides* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

8. A definitive distinction between the existential and predicative meanings of *einai* would not be achieved until Plato.

9. Some scholars claim to have detected references to Thales, Anaximander, Alcmaeon, and Heraclitus in Parmenides' poem — see K. Freeman, *Companion to the Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 143.

10. For discussion of this last point, the reader is encouraged to examine F.M. Cornford's *Plato and Parmenides*, especially chapter 2; A. Nehamas, "Parmenidean Being/Heraclitean Fire," in *Presocratic Philosophy*, ed. Victor Miles Caston and Daniel W Graham (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002); and P. Curd, *Legacy*, introduction.

11. C.M. Bowra notes the prologue closely parallels the imagery and style of Pindar — see "The Proem of Parmenides," *Classical Philology* 32 (1937): 97–112.

12. A major thematic premise of A. Hermann's *To Think Like God* (Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2004).

13. This is the idea taken up by Gorgias in his *On Not-Being*, the interpretation of which remains subject to debate — see chapter 9.

14. Of course, this premise constitutes a major fallacy in Parmenides' assertion. The human mind is fully capable of conjuring the nonexistent — think unicorns and mermaids.

15. This point will be raised again in fragment 8, where it is argued that one cannot find thinking without Being — a premise echoed by Plato in *Theaetetus* (189a): "To think (or say) what is false is to think what is not; but that is to think nothing; and that, again, is not to think at all."

16. Some scholars have assumed that this particular reference is a criticism of Heraclitean thought. See fragments 8 and 51 in Diels, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957).

17. This may be the earliest instance of the term *logos* being used in the sense of dialectical reasoning, an approach later made famous by Socrates. It is also a justification for identifying Parmenides as the first true philosopher.

18. *Nihil ex Nihilo* ("Nothing can come from Nothing") is a negative statement of the principle of sufficient reason later codified by thinkers such as Leibniz and Kant.

19. Here Melissus deviates sharply from his master by arguing that "What Is" has no *perata* (limits) and is in fact *apeiron* (i.e., infinite). This departure from Elean orthodoxy is legitimate to the extent that one is entitled to ask what exactly borders and delimits a Reality described as unitary and finite.

20. The later atomists responded to these premises by agreeing that there was no qualitative change but they saved the phenomena by insisting what "is not" does exist in the form of void.

21. Western philosophy would not encounter anything comparable to the deductive system advanced by Parmenides until Plato's middle dialogues.

22. This was the Cynic's famous response to Zeno's paradoxic rejection of motion.

23. A good example being the various *arche* proposed by the Milesians, which were just as mutable as the rest of the sensory world.

24. This appears to be the meaning of Parmenides' insistence that "you will not find thinking without Being."

25. It is in this sense that one can legitimately view Platonism as the final elaboration of the logical and metaphysical realism advanced by Parmenides. There are many illustrations of Eleatic affectation to be found in Plato's mature works. The subject of "Being" is examined in the dialogue *Sophist*. In *Timaeus* (37e–38a) the relationship between eternal Being and time is considered in terms strongly redolent of Parmenides (cf. *Parmenides* 141c). The influence of Parmenides is also strongly evident in several aspects of Plato's epistemology. For example, Plato agrees entirely that legitimate knowledge claims can only be asserted when the mind is in contact with something beyond the realm of sense (i.e., the Forms). Moreover, Plato's insistence on self-predication as a defining feature of the Forms is intimately connected to Parmenides' description of "What Is." These parallels are fully manifest in the description of Beauty proffered by Diotima in *Symposium* (210e–211b): "First it always is and neither comes to be nor passes away, neither grows nor diminishes. Next, it is not beautiful in this way and ugly in that, nor is it beautiful at some time, and not at another ... but is itself by itself and with itself, always one in form" (Curd, 229).

In short, it is impossible to imagine the ripened thought of Plato in the absence of Parmenidean antecedents.

26. A true "system" of logic had to wait for the genius of Aristotle and the composition

of his *Organon*. Still, it can be said that the Stagirite, as well as the many logicians who followed, all shared an Elean forefather.

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7

Themistocles (524–459 B.C.)

Savior of the Western World

Few men in Greek history can claim a greater role in preserving the cultural identity and political autonomy of Europe than Themistocles. A gifted statesman and military tactician, Themistocles was born in Athens, a member of the Lycomid clan. His father, Neocles, was a native Athenian, but there is evidence that his mother may have been of Thracian or Carian descent.

Themistocles was a pivotal figure throughout much of the early 5th century and, as such, was intimately involved in the fierce political infighting typical of the times. Although he was elected *archon* in 493/492, the ostracism votes of the 480s suggest Themistocles was the target of continuous political attack. In fact, his name appears on at least 2,264 *ostraca* recovered by archeologists, including a cache of 190 shards prepared by only fourteen individuals. Conspiratorial efforts such as these to terminate Themistocles' public life were generally unsuccessful given his extraordinary political acumen. Indeed, in the political battles of the late 480's it was Themistocles' chief rivals, men such as Xanthippus and Aristides, who were expelled from the city. Plutarch (5.4) believed much of Themistocles' immunity to political machination was also attributable to the strong support he enjoyed from the *demos*.

Still, Themistocles' talents were not as evident on the domestic political front as they were in dealing with the Persian menace. In 490 B.C. he stood in the ranks of the *marathonomachoi*, the heroes who repulsed the Persian forces dispatched by Darius. Ten years later a much larger army, perhaps 300,000 in all, was commissioned by Xerxes to avenge his father's humiliation and to convert independent Europe into a Persian *satrapy*. It was under these dire circumstances that Themistocles revealed his uncanny prescience, equaled only by a correspondingly remarkable capacity to "instantly strike upon the proper expedient" (Thucydides 1.138). It was, for example, he who convinced

the Athenians to dedicate the newly discovered silver at Larium to the construction of 200 triremes — the ships that would subsequently save Greece from Persian domination.[1] And it was Themistocles who pieced together the fragile Greek alliance, a notoriously difficult task among the ever-divisive Hellenes. He was also responsible for lending a prudential interpretation to certain key omens and oracles that preceded the second war with Persia. Above all, Themistocles devised the naval strategy that secured Greece's improbable triumph at Salamis.

As is well known, there was more to the Salamis victory than merely the courage and craft of the Greek oarsmen. In great measure, the struggle for Europe was won by Themistoclean ruse. Upon learning that his Peloponnesian allies were considering a withdrawal to the Isthmus, Themistocles feigned friendship toward the Persians while secretly dispatching a slave to the Great King, alerting him to the planned pullback. He also promised that if the Persian armada attacked the Greek navy at its current location, the Athenians would detach themselves from the Hellenic alliance. This brilliant subterfuge accomplished two things. First, by forcing the Peloponnesian contingents to hold their positions, the Greek fleet suffered no dilution of its fighting strength. Second and most importantly, the Persians were lured into the narrow straits between the island of Salamis and the mainland, where their numerical superiority was largely negated. The result changed the course of Western history.

Following his spectacular success in orchestrating the war effort, Themistocles became an object of adulation among the Greeks. When he appeared at the Olympic Games after the conflict, throngs of well-wishers lost interest in the athletes and instead anxiously crowded about the man who had saved Hellas. Even the distrustful Spartans extended him unprecedented honors during a visit to Laconia in the winter of 480/479 B.C. But laudations such as these were still not enough to gratify Themistocles' restless genius. There remained one additional item on his agenda — the securing of Athens' future greatness. Toward this end, Themistocles initiated the reconstruction of an expanded defensive wall around the city, a move that instantly aroused Spartan suspicions. Most importantly, it was Themistocles who accurately divined the necessity of a thalassocratic strategy for Athens.[2] Accordingly, he promoted the fortification of the Piraeus, which, in conjunction with Cimon's construction of the Long Walls, effectively converted Athens into an impregnable "island" fortress. Initiatives such as these not only advanced the hegemonic claims of Athens among the Greeks, they also fueled the city's imperial ambitions, contributing directly to the formation of the Athenian empire. Moreover, the decision to transform Athens into a maritime power also altered the internal dynamics of Athenian politics. The thousands of *thetes* required to

man the fleet meant that rowers and boatswains would inevitably acquire a new voice in determining the civic affairs of the city.

With these changes in the political landscape came an opportunity for Themistocles' enemies to move against him and, in 471 B.C., a coalition of his opponents succeeded in having him ostracized. Upon leaving Athens, he relocated to Argos and also visited a variety of other city-states in the Peloponnese, where he is reported to have fomented anti–Spartan sentiment. The Spartans countered with charges that Themistocles, along with the Spartan king Pausanias, was guilty of "medising" (i.e., conspiring with Persia). The Athenian response was to condemn Themistocles to death *in absentia*. Despite efforts to apprehend him, Themistocles succeeded in making his way to Asia Minor, where the Persian king, Artaxerxes, not only afforded him asylum but eventually appointed him governor of three cities — Magnesia, Lampsacus, and Myus. Upon his death in 495 B.C., the Magnesians formally extended him heroic status. It is also reported that his family eventually returned his remains to Attica, where they were interred near the large harbor of the Piraeus.

One of the terms Homer uses to describe the character of Odysseus is *polumetis*, denoting qualities such as guile, prudence, craftiness, and cunning. The record of his many achievements clearly indicates that Themistocles, too, was *polumetis*, the Athenian equivalent of Odysseus. More than any of his contemporaries, Themistocles displayed that crucial blend of sagacity and shrewdness possessed by all master tacticians, and while it may be impossible to say with certainty what might have occurred had the nimble genius of Themistocles not been available to the Greek cause, at least this much seems probable: the victory of Salamis (September 29, 480 B.C.), an axial moment in the history of Western culture, spared Greece the bitter yoke of slavery. Had the Greeks faltered at this battle, the spirit and substance of our civilization, much that we consider uniquely emblematic of the West, would have been lost. Freedom of thought, speech, and action would have yielded to the oppressive whim of Achaemenid absolutism. Imperial dictate would have eclipsed rule of law and legal due process. Instead of *archons* and citizens, Europe would have known satraps and *proskynesis*.[3] In addition to its political liberty, failure at Salamis would also have cost the West much of its intellectual inheritance. Under Persian hegemony the sovereign flame of reason would have dimmed in favor of hermeticism; divination and astrology, rather than science and philosophy, would have dominated the cultural horizon. One can only imagine how entirely different the Western world would have been had the magi held sway as opposed to Socrates and Plato. Indeed, it may not

be too much to say that the very notion of a distinctively "Western world" would have been impossible in the absence of Themistocles' wily victory at Salamis.

Notes

1. The initial reason for the construction of these new ships was the ongoing conflict with Aegina.
2. That is, sea power as the key to Athenian fortunes.
3. The obligatory prostration used at the Persian court.

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8

Phidias (490–430 B.C.)

Lord of Western Aesthetics

Among the many legacies bestowed by ancient Hellenism, none has left a deeper impression than Greek art. Indeed, any reference to Greek antiquity tends to reflexively summon up artistic images, perhaps even before the imagination settles upon the likes of Socrates, Plato, or Aristotle. The explanation for this turn of mind stems from two significant features of Hellenic civilization. First, no other ancient people were more invested in aesthetic categories than the Greeks. The amount of energy and resource they committed to exploring the profundities of beauty was without parallel. Beyond what we discover in Egypt, China, or India, the Greeks seem to have been peculiarly dedicated to swathing themselves in artistic imagery. In this regard, the ubiquity of their efforts left behind a vast treasury of what became paradigmatic works, works that shaped and inspired Western aesthetic consciousness for more than two thousand years.

In addition to the impressive volume of their achievement, there is also the matter of the quality of their production. Greek art enjoyed its remarkable influence not simply because it was produced in abundance. What made this art uniquely authoritative was, above all, its ethos. Here it is important not to view ancient art from modern perspectives. To conceive of Greek art as merely decorative or as a source of entertainment is to fundamentally misconstrue the cultural objectives of Greek aesthetic activity. In ultimate terms, Greek art was a spiritual enterprise, an attempt to nourish the human soul by explicating the mystery of beauty.[1] This was the normative center of Hellenic art, an ideal that played a potent role in forging the Western aesthetic canon.

Given their aesthetic priorities, it is not surprising the Greeks produced a long and illustrious roster of artistic masters. Names such as Myron, Poly-

cleitus, Praxiteles, Scopas, Lysippus, Polygnotus, Zeuxis, Apelles,[2] and so on are familiar to art historians worldwide. There is, however, one name that stands above the rest, a single, dominating figure who left a deep and lasting impression upon Western notions of beauty — Phidias. In the ancient world he was acknowledged as a unique genius whose works comprised an unofficial standard by which the talents of other artists were gauged. Dio Chrysostom, for example, in his *12th Discourse* refers to Phidias as "wise and divinely inspired" and as the "best and noblest of artists." Similar views were expressed by Pliny (N.H. 34.49), who ranked Phidias first among a multitude of great masters. In the *Greek Anthology* (81) we find the testimony of Philip of Thessalonica, who describes the magnificence of Phidias' Olympian Zeus by exclaiming, "Phidias! Either god came down to earth from heaven to show thee his likeness or thou didst find a way to see god." The same statue seems to have powerfully moved the Roman general L. Aemilius Paullus, whom Livy (45.28) describes as being "stirred to the quick" as he gazed upon Phidias' masterpiece. These are the sorts of impressions that made Phidias' creations an aesthetic template in antiquity.[3] Specifically, they explain how images of his creations came to be stamped upon coins, engraved on gems, chiseled into metalwork, impressed upon terracotta reliefs, and painted on pottery. In addition, Phidias enjoyed the extraordinary honor of having one of his works listed among the seven wonders of the ancient world.[4] Not surprisingly, a chorus of modern scholars continues to sing Phidias' many praises.[5]

Biographically, we know a good deal about Phidias, although certain details regarding his life, particularly the circumstances of his demise, remain muddled. We know he was a native Athenian, the son of Charmides, and that he acquired his skills as a sculptor from Hegias (and perhaps also from the more noted Argive master Hagelades). The ancient sources attest to an artist of genius in a myriad of fields. Not only did he work in marble, he was also proficient in a variety of related media, including bronze, chryselephantine (gold and ivory), and acrolithic.[6] Moreover, Pliny (N.H. 35.54) informs us that Phidias was also a skilled painter and that he actually began his career in this field. Pliny notes further that Panaenus, a brother[7] of Phidias who assisted him at Olympia, was himself a well-known artist responsible for the Battle of Marathon portrait at the Stoa Poikilē of Athens.[8] Additionally, we learn that Phidias produced several outstanding protégés in the course of his career, most notably Alcamenes and Agoracritus.

There is little doubt that much of Phidias' fame and reputation stem from his involvement in the Periclean beautification project at Athens, particularly the adornment of the Parthenon. With the exception of the colossal cult statue, however, it is impossible to attribute any of the other works (e.g., metopes,

friezes, pedimentary figures) directly to Phidias, despite Plutarch's assertion (*Pericles* 13.9) that Phidias was the *episcopos*, or general overseer, of all sculptural activity.

Plutarch also reports that Phidias was twice indicted by the Athenians for purely political reasons. The first charge was one of embezzlement relating to the cult statue's golden drapery. This allegation was easily refuted because the gold plates had been cast in such a way that they could be easily removed and weighed. The second accusation involved a charge of impiety to the effect that Phidias had included a likeness of himself and Pericles on the goddess' shield.[9] Plutarch claims (*Pericles* 31.5) that this accusation resulted in a successful prosecution and that Phidias subsequently died in an Athenian prison of either illness or poison.[10] There is, however, an alternative version of Phidias' death. According to Philochorus, who dates Phidias' trial at Athens to 438 B.C., the artist fled his native city and went to Olympia, where the Eleans retained his services for the construction of a colossal chryselephantine rendering of Zeus. This account seems more likely than that of Plutarch, given certain archeological evidence. Between 1954 and 1958, a German team unearthed Phidias' *ergasterion* (workshop), dating from the 430s. The excavators even produced a small cup with the inscription "I belong to Phidias," now on display at the Olympian museum. According to Philochorus, Phidias was again charged with peculation at Olympia and ended his days in an Elean prison.

A Brief Summary of Greek Art[11]

The origins of Greek art have been an object of debate from at least the 18th century, when Johann Joachim Winckelmann categorically asserted that the Hellenic achievement was an entirely autochthonous phenomenon. This claim is baffling, given the fact that Winckelmann's own massive study, *The History of Ancient Art*, is replete with examples of Egyptian, Persian, and Phoenician antecedents. Unfortunately, Winckelmann's Hellenocentric bias, with its rejection of all Oriental influence, dominated the interpretive horizon for many years. Modern research has since liberated itself from the tyranny of such tendentious thinking and today fully acknowledges Greek art's indebtedness to earlier Eastern sources.

Today, art historians often trace the earliest foundations of Greek art to a series of fascinating figural sculptures from the Cycladic islands (e.g., Paros, Amorgos, Keros, and Naxos).[12] Some of these small, wonderfully abstract pieces can be dated to the early Bronze Age (3000 B.C.), although the high point of Cycladic art seems to have occurred during the Keros-Syros period

(2700–2200 B.C.). The majority of these works have been located in grave sites, a fact that may indicate they had funereal significance. Large numbers of these sculptures were exported to Crete and to various areas of mainland Greece, particularly the environs of Attica. Experts agree that this Bronze Age art exercised an important influence on both Minoan Crete and the Helladic culture of mainland Greece.

A far more extensive influence upon Greek art occurred later, during the so-called "Orientalizing Revolution" of the 9th and 8th centuries B.C. It was at this time that East met West in a series of commercial and cultural exchanges that proved pivotal to the development of Hellenic civilization. Greek trading sites were well established at Al Mina on the Orontes River by the 9th century. Footholds such as these in Asia Minor exposed the Greeks to a wide range of new artistic themes and motifs, especially Syrian and Phoenician. Hellenic art between the Geometric (900–720 B.C.) and the Archaic periods (620–480 B.C.) clearly reflects this influence.

The eventual appearance of monumental sculpture among the Greeks (i.e., large-scale statuary) is also related directly to Oriental sources. Herodotus (2.154) explains the likely origins of this development. Prior to the reign of Psammetichos I, Egypt had been closed to foreign settlement, but in return for their service as mercenary troops, a group of Ionian Greeks and Carians were granted two parcels of land on opposite sides of the Nile Delta. These arrangements afforded the Greeks a first-hand opportunity to study Egyptian culture, including their venerable artistic conventions. Not coincidentally, the earliest appearance of monumental Greek art occurs shortly after the establishment of these colonies in the mid–7th century B.C.

The specific works involved in this new phase of Greece's artistic evolution are the so-called *kouros/kore* (male/female) figures of the Archaic period. Even the most cursory analysis of these sculptures reveals an undeniable affinity with Egyptian prototypes. By far the most characteristic unifying element is a pervasive sense of stilted tension: arms hanging stiffly at the sides, legs inseparably locked together, torso and head aligned in an inflexibly mechanical frontal stance. Above all, these works express a dominance of vertical axis without any hint of motion. Indeed, the rigidity of these statues compels the viewer to perceive the human form in almost two-dimensional terms.

For nearly two centuries the ancient canons of Egyptian art dominated Hellenic aesthetic protocols. The only Greek innovations made during this period were a formulaic use of male nudity, the elimination of the rear support strut common in Egyptian sculpture, and the inclusion of an enigmatic grin known as the "archaic smile." By approximately 480 B.C., however, the hegemony of Egyptian artistic conventions came to an end with a series of bold

Hellenic innovations. In this regard, pride of place must be assigned the "Kritios Boy," a small sculptural piece that signals the precise moment when Greek artists liberated themselves from the frozen paradigms of the Nile. With the creation of this work, the lifeless, cubic monotony that had guided oriental taste for millennia was conspicuously suppressed in favor of a new dynamic style that became increasingly lively, accurate, and natural.

Unlike Egyptian works, which remained the eternal children of the quarry, Greek sculpture from this moment on conveys an unprecedented energy and suppleness signaling the human form's historic emergence from its marmoreal chrysalis. Specifically, the Kritios Boy includes a series of subtle weight shifts, as indicated by the asymmetry of the shoulder stance and by a gentle tilting of the head. Traditional frontal posture is replaced by an innovative assignment of weight to the left leg, anticipating the full contraposto (in Greek, *chiasmus*) of later works, such as Polycleitus' masterpiece the *Doryphoros* (spear-bearer).[13] Even the facial expression has been modified, the archaic smile replaced by a new, contemplative gaze. Thus, by the 5th century B.C., the Greeks had melted the icy effigies of Egyptian art. No longer would Greek art merely seek to symbolize human reality; thereafter it would attempt to create "living" beings out of stone.

The lithic revolution achieved by the Kritios Boy announces one of the most spectacular eras in human history — the Golden Age of Greece (in Greek, *pentekontaetia*). The outpouring of optimism and promise permeating the Greek world during this time was no doubt related to the triumph of Hellenic forces over the Persians at places such as Marathon, Salamis, and Plataea. Flushed with these victories, the Greeks experienced an "exaltation of national sentiment" that nourished their achievements in literature, poetry, philosophy, and especially art. Nowhere did the bright rays of this Hellenic summer shine more brilliantly than at Athens, the native city of Phidias.

This period in which Phidias worked is often referred to as the "high" classical. What is designated by this term? To begin with, the art of this age mirrors the logic of Protagoras' dictum, "Man is the measure of all things." Greek art of the classical era is strenuously anthropocentric; it reflects a powerful Hellenic instinct to distill everything in life to human terms and, in the process, to make man the locus of all value and worth. In great measure, this humanistic narrative was a unique feature of Hellenic art and a major point of demarcation between Greek and non–Greek artistic statement. It explains, for example, why we find so little theriomorphic representation in Greek art (i.e., deities portrayed in animal form), despite its ubiquity among the Egyptians and Babylonians. By the late 8th century B.C., the Greeks had apparently determined that such representation was inconsistent with the dignity and

honor due the gods and that only the human form was a fitting avatar of divine essence.

The decision to offer humanity as the exclusive instrument of Olympian portrayal may have been one of the greatest contributions of Greek art to world culture. For one thing, it announced and promoted a historic elevation of human status via the humanization of the godhead. Man alone, according to this depictive logic, was worthy of bearing the image of the gods. Thus, Greek art served to narrow the chasm between heaven and earth. More specifically, an anthropomorphized aesthetic encouraged notions of a divinized humanity. In short, the gods were made more human and men were made more divine. Additionally, by cloaking humanity in the mantle of divinity, the Greeks infused their art with an exhortative idealism. Mankind was invited to take its measure against a divine standard and, in the process, to appropriate a highly idealized patrimony. Many of the rudiments of the West's humanistic traditions are undoubtedly traceable to this apotheosizing tendency of Greek art.

Perhaps more than any other manifestation of their culture, it is this idealism that discloses the soul-landscape of the Greeks. In particular, it is the art of the high classical era, the art produced by preeminent masters such as Phidias, that reflects Hellenism at its finest hour. By what means did the Greeks advance their aesthetic idealism? What were the governing methods and principles that guided their efforts? On one level, the Greeks tended to employ an exclusionary strategy that aggressively attempted to minimize subjective, mercurial, and superfluous elements. This explains why Greek sculpture tends to remain mute about the age, rank, origin, and background of its subject matter. Instinctively, Greek artists sensed the fundamental incompatibility between the particular and the ideal. These sentiments also explain the general paucity of ornamental details in Greek art. The Hellenic artists were quick to perceive that a key ingredient in the production of an ideal art was unencumbered simplicity. Repetitive detail and ornate patterns can easily become visual distractions that disrupt and fragment aesthetic experience. In contrast, the Greeks sought a kind of parsimony; their works were presented in a focused, uncomplicated manner in an effort to minimize visual dissonance. These efforts at undiluted display ensured both the thematic integrity of the work and the proper attunement of viewer attention.

In addition, we may speak of the Greeks consistently maintaining a dedication to "category art"; rather than presenting a particular illustration of some theme or subject, they sought instead to embody the larger class or genus. These efforts to avoid the singular images of quotidian experience had a powerfully elevating effect upon their works. In particular, it advanced an

ethereal agenda that insisted art point beyond itself— that it assume a spiritual trajectory.

A concomitant feature of Hellenic art's quest for the "type" is its concerted attempt to transcend the boundaries of time. For the Greeks, part of representing aesthetic "truth" involved creating a chronologically defiant statement — an art capable of placing itself beyond the ephemeral restrictions of everyday routines — in the hope of capturing the uniquely permanent substance of a given subject matter. This bias against the time-specific elements is impressively reflected in the figural sculptures of the Parthenon, where the limitations of temporal specificity are skillfully muted. Here, we see horsemen, gods, and combatants presented in their abiding, idealized essence. Indeed, the spirit of earthly detachment achieved in these works is so extraordinary that the figures assume an almost metaphysical air redolent of Platonism.

These were the basic lineaments of Greek art during its greatest moment, and there was no artist who understood them more thoroughly or applied them more assiduously than Phidias. Of all the masters of the classical era, none was more adept at performing those mysterious rites by which cold, lifeless stone was somehow made to throb with sublime vitality. It was specifically this ability to lend inert matter a supra-mundane quality, the capacity to transform raw stone into something lofty and timeless, that explains the renown of Hellenic art in general and the preeminence of Phidias in particular. Above all, the enduring quality of this art lies in its epiphanic capacity. No visual art in history has been more effective at stirring the inner recesses of humanity's collective soul and revealing that which is highest and best in the human spirit.[14]

The Works of Phidias

Although Phidias is best known for the chryselephantine statuary he executed at Athens and Elis, he is also said to have created other noteworthy works as far afield as Delphi and Plataea. In addition, there were two other sculptures of Athena at Athens that earned him considerable notoriety. First, there was a large bronze image of the goddess cast from the spoils collected after the victory of Marathon. This work, known as the Athena Promachus (foremost in battle), stood thirty feet tall and was dedicated around 456 B.C. According to Pausanias (1.28.2), the statue's helmet and spear tip were visible as far away as Sunium. The second piece is known as the Lemnian Athena, so named for the Athenian *cleruchs*[15] from Lemnos who commissioned the work around 451–448 B.C. Notwithstanding the profound effect the colossal

cult figures must have had upon viewers, several ancient sources insist the Phidian work most worthy of praise was the "Lemnia."[16] This was the verdict offered by Pausanias (1.28.3) and seconded by Lucian, who in his *Essays* (4–6) speaks glowingly of the statue's exquisite facial contours. In this particular case, modern connoisseurs are in a rare position to formulate a tentative assessment of their own. We possess two excellent copies of what we believe are accurate representations of Phidias' original creation — one at Bologna, the other at Dresden.[17] Each of these images impressively validates the acclaim assigned the composition in antiquity. In particular, the goddess' impassible demeanor, detached gaze, and exalted serenity all lead to the inevitable conclusion that the Lemnia was a remarkable epitome of divine essence.

Although it is fair to assume that Phidias' prominence as an artist would have been assured by his more traditional works in bronze and marble, it is undoubtedly the monumental chryselephantine statues that account for his unprecedented status in the ancient world.[18] The challenges in creating such statuary were, to say the least, daunting. Not only were there extraordinary obstacles concerning the sheer size and expense of these projects, there were also a variety of technical complexities, the solutions to which required great ingenuity on the part of the artist. In terms of scale, Phidias may have begun his efforts by creating a series of clay models aimed at helping to conceptualize the elements of a full-scale rendering. The next step would have involved the construction of the statue's wooden armature. Given the figure's final weight, it was imperative to select a wood noted for strength and stability. In this regard, both Pliny and Dio Chrysostom advocated the use of cyprus wood, while Theophrastus spoke highly of the citrus tree's durability.

Once the wooden skeleton had been assembled, Phidias had to address one of the more technically demanding phases of his enterprise — working with ivory. With chryselephantine statuary, virtually all of the exposed skin areas (e.g., arms, legs, face) were represented by thin strips of ivory.[19] The difficulty lay in the bending and shaping of this highly intractable material. Plutarch (*Vice* 499e) explains that ivory can be made ductile by a long soaking in beer. Other ancient techniques of imparting malleability included boiling in wine, soaking in vinegar, and various methods of heating. After achieving the desired pliancy, the artist had to perform the labor-intensive task of shaping and fitting hundreds of strips of ivory in an effort to simulate the suppleness of living flesh.[20] Beyond this painstakingly meticulous phase of the operation, the artist also had to concern himself with a myriad of ornamental details. Among other things, Phidias must have been involved in designing and executing a multitude of decorative elements such as garments, crowns, shields, spears, helmets, thrones, Nike statuettes,[21] and so forth.

As incredibly difficult and protracted as these projects must have been, the end results were, by all reports, incomparable expressions of Greek artistic genius. Fortunately, we have detailed descriptions for both the Parthenos,[22] the cult figure of Athena located in the Parthenon's east chamber, and the Olympian Zeus at Elis. The best source of these depictions is that inveterate literary cicerone, Pausanias. Here are his observations concerning "our lady of Athens" (1.24.5–7):

> The statue itself is made of ivory and gold, on the middle of her helmet is placed a likeness of the Sphinx ... on either side of the helmet are griffins in relief ... the statue of Athena is upright, with a tunic reaching to the feet, and on her breast the head of Medusa is worked in ivory. She holds a statue of Victory about four cubits high, and in the other hand, a spear; at her feet lies a shield and near the spear is a serpent. The serpent would be Erichthonius. On the pedestal is the birth of Pandora in relief.

Standing some forty feet tall, the Parthenos must have made a powerful impression upon all viewers.[23] In addition, Pausanias' casual reference to "gold" as a constituent element of the statue is a considerable understatement. Multiple sources, including the historian Thucydides (2.13.5), report that the goddess' image was sheathed with at least forty talents of the precious metal, or about twenty-five hundred pounds.[24] Unfortunately, this wondrous figure was destroyed by fire in the third century A.D., probably as a result of the invasion by the Heruli in 267.

As spectacular as the Athena must have been, there are grounds to suggest that Phidias' Olympian Zeus may actually have surpassed his efforts at Athens. For one thing, this work alone, among his many creations, was recognized as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was also a commonplace notion among the admiring masses that no man could die happy unless he had first beheld the Phidian Zeus. Pausanias (5.1.11) describes the figure as follows:

> The god sits on a throne, and he is made of gold and ivory. On his head lies a garland which is a copy of olive shoots. In his right hand he carries a Victory, which, like the statue, is of ivory and gold; she wears a ribbon and — on her head — a garland. In the left hand of the god is a sceptre, ornamented with every kind of metal, and the bird sitting on the sceptre is the eagle. The sandals also of the god are of gold, as is likewise his robe. On the robe are embroidered figures of animals and the flowers of the lily. The throne is adorned with gold and with jewels, to say nothing of ebony and ivory.

What may have distinguished this piece from everything else Phidias created was not simply the statue's anatomical accuracy or its many splendid appointments, but rather the degree to which the work captured the supernal

majesty of the father of the gods. While the immensity of the work must have created an overwhelming sense of divine presence,[25] at the same time the image apparently conveyed an aloof grandeur suggestive of distant Olympian heights. Perhaps, then, the explanation for this work's special supremacy lay in its remarkable capacity to translate transcendent essence into immanent form.[26]

A further demonstration of the statue's status is seen in the decision to remove it from its original home at Olympia to the city of Constantinople. As the city of Constantine grew in prestige and power, it increasingly seemed inappropriate for such a magnificent work to languish in the provinces. Accordingly, Byzantine historians report Phidias' masterpiece was, by imperial edict, relocated to the east, where it was eventually destroyed by fire in A.D. 475.

The Phidian Legacy

Tracing the long-term impact of Phidias' genius is no easy task, given the remarkable proliferation of artistic schools and movements that have emerged over the centuries. All attempts to specifically identify the influences of the ancient master must, therefore, be approached in a spirit of caution and humility. While the influences of Phidias are undoubtedly present in the Western aesthetic canon, they can only be read as deeply embedded beneath many years of divergent artistic expression. This is particularly the case with regard to modern art, where affinities with the classical tradition are, to say the least, tenuous (see below). Notwithstanding this inevitable tendency for each era to impose its own imprimatur on the meaning and substance of art, echoes of the ancient exemplars are nevertheless sufficiently evident to justify notions of a persistent Phidian legacy.

One area in which scholars believe the influence of Phidias may have been particularly significant involves our efforts to portray the likenesses of gods. Gardner (81–82), for example, believes that the Phidian representation of divinity marked a new and, in some respects, unprecedented representation that was "accepted as canonical by all later generations." Similar views are expressed by K.D.S. Lapatin (85), who claims that the Olympian Zeus, in particular, became not only the paradigm for all subsequent images of divine majesty, but also came to serve as the model for portraits of Hellenistic kings and Roman emperors. In addition, Lapatin suggests the Phidian model of godly essence may live on in various aspects of the Eastern Church's iconography, particularly the renderings of Christ Pantocrator (Christ the Almighty).

Perhaps the most obvious and potentially fruitful place to search for con-

tinuities of the Phidian heritage is Renaissance Italy. There is no doubt that the great Renaissance artists relied upon classical exemplars as a source of both technical information and aesthetical inspiration. This is not to suggest, however, that their works attempted an exact replication of classical paradigms. Every age invariably develops its own artistic idiom, and the Renaissance was no exception. Still, the virtuosity of such earlier geniuses as Phidias served as the Renaissance's undisputed standard of artistic perfection. In fact, the confident, self-reliant spirit that underlies so much Renaissance art is traceable to the belief that 16th-century Italy had rediscovered the secrets of ancient masters such as Phidias and Apelles (Rowland 146). It was in this sense that the antique remained a governing norm throughout this remarkable period in the history of Western art.

Perhaps the best illustration of these points is provided by the virtuoso achievements of Michelangelo. We know that this great master was an assiduous student of ancient works, which he believed best embodied the spiritual ideals he wished to reproduce in his own forms. We can see the impact of these investigations in many of his works, but perhaps the best illustration is found in one of his greatest masterpieces, the statue of David. Beyond his other sculptures, this piece may be the most successful at capturing the Phidian ideal. In particular, it has been observed that the torso of the David reflects a signature feature of the Phidian achievement — specifically, a magical concatenation of anatomical precision and abstract sublimity (Rowland 198). A similar assessment has also been made in reference to Michelangelo's stone relief of the Battle of Centaurs and Lapiths at the Casa Buonarroti (Florence). Here again, we have an example of a work that might have been at home in ancient Greece to the extent that it clearly bespeaks the grandeur of Phidian prototypes.

Although identifying concrete examples of a Phidian patrimony becomes increasingly difficult the closer one comes to modern times, there are a few noteworthy illustrations of Phidias' lingering effects. In the 19th and 20th centuries two prominent public commissions were offered to commemorate George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. The work depicting Washington was sculpted by Horatio Greenough between 1832 and 1841 and is today part of the National Collection of Fine Arts. The Lincoln statue (dedicated in 1922) was produced by Daniel Chester French and is the highlight of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. French's work is the most universally recognized American portrait. Each statue portrays the president situated on a throne-like seat suggestive of otherworldly dignities. The inspiration for these works is, without question, the Olympian Zeus by Phidias and has been identified as such by numerous scholars.[27]

Ancient Versus Modern Art

The discontinuities between the art of the classical era and modern art, between Phidias and artists such as Duchamp, Pollock, and Warhol, present a valuable opportunity for oppositional learning. That is, by comparing these two contrary orientations we stand to gain a more detailed understanding of the unique features of each. There are many potential criteria one might employ in conducting such a comparative analysis. For our purposes, however, the assessment will be limited to three considerations — the function of art in society, the protocols of artistic activity, and the role of the artist.

Although the ancients were not in the habit of producing detailed treatises on artistic theory,[28] this much remains clear: art among the Greeks was an integral aspect of a larger cultural agenda. Specifically, art was a means of promoting an idealized sense of beauty, a beauty unstained by the imperfections of nature and time but nevertheless fully real and relevant. The Greeks believed art of this sort possessed certain alembic qualities — it could purify the aesthetic perspective of superfluous elements, sharpening thereby opportunities for spiritual revelation. In essence, then, art for the ancients was fundamentally pedagogic, a means of illuminating the human spirit through the enchanting qualities of beauty.[29]

In comparing these points with modern art, one is immediately struck by the absence of parallels. Indeed, it is almost impossible to arrive at any consistent sense of modern art's values and purposes. Is the object of this art to entertain, to shock, to amuse, or to provide an investment opportunity? About the only constant purpose one can detect in modern art is an ongoing attempt to disassociate itself from traditional aesthetic foundations. In particular, there has been a concerted effort to deconstruct all theories, standards, and practices relating to beauty. Art, according to most modern practitioners, need not have anything to do with the beautiful. Two consequences unavoidably emerge from this logic. First, it has triggered a hermeneutical chaos that has rendered the lines between kitsch[30] and serious art indistinguishable in popular imagination. Moreover, it has made necessary a continuous query, one that would never have occurred to Phidias: "Is it really art?" Second, by allowing everything from urinals to cigar bands to qualify as art, modern art has explicitly abandoned any aspiration to instruct. Whatever the purposes of modern art may be, there seems to be little interest in edifying and elevating the human spirit.

Another area of marked discontinuity between classical and modern art concerns the issue of artistic protocol. Unlike much of today's art, in antiquity masters such as Phidias operated under the aegis of well-established artistic

norms. This is not to suggest there were no variations in style or that individual artists were denied experimental opportunity. Still, innovations always tended to occur within the parameters of certain culturally determined conventions. Chief among these established principles was the idea of *mimesis*, or "imitation." Today, when we employ the term "imitation," we tend to think of copying. This was not the ancient meaning. Rather, the ancients used the word to indicate physical reproduction or replication of perceived reality or truth. Thus, as a mimetic artist, Phidias created his Olympian Zeus as a representation of divine virtue in human form, the key point being that Phidias' activities did not involve sculpting something that did not "exist"—*mimesis* was not invention. In creating his chryselephantine masterpiece, Phidias was guided by nature's representation of the human form, while religious and poetic conventions determined his imagery of the god. In short, Phidias' artistic projects were always, in some sense, guided and informed by a series of preexisting standards that lent consistent meaning to his works.

Modern art, by contrast, has increasingly committed itself to the inner world of the artist, where expressive value takes precedence over representational value. This trend is clearly illustrated by the anarchic profusion of schools and movements—Fauvism, Cubism, Dada, Surrealism, pop art, op art, Superrealism, performance art—peculiar to modernity's artistic landscape. In the name of creative liberation, artists have defied every convention and rejected almost all normative criteria. In fact, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the aim of modern art is to have no aim at all, which in turn explains why so much contemporary art seems to lack demarcation, limit, or guiding precept. Whereas Phidias' creative energies always remained fundamentally loyal to certain canonical injunctions, modern art has been privatized.[31] Today, artistic judgment mirrors the interior world of the artist, and tends to do so exclusively. The consequences of this new interiority are clearly evident. Among other things, art as the personal memoir of the artist has legitimized novelty as an end in itself, so much so that it no longer seems adequate simply to speak of modern art's renunciation of conventional loyalties. It is, perhaps, more appropriate today to think in terms of modern art's nihilism.[32]

The final comparative area involves the role of the artist and, more specifically, the relative priority between the object created and the agent of creation. In antiquity, it was clearly understood that the priority rested with the art, not the artificer. All of the great masters of the classical era, even an individual with the celebrity of a Phidias, were content to remain in the shadows of their work. This order of priority, given the subject matter and cultural purposes of Hellenic art, is easy enough to understand. It explains, for example, the offense taken by the people of Athens at Phidias' alleged inclusion of

his own image on Athena's shield. From a modern perspective, this may seem a rather innocuous infraction, but to the ancients it was a violation of both religious and artistic protocol. In Phidias' day, art was an expression of communal values and ideals. As such, it was intended to speak for itself in ways specifically designed to immunize it from subjective infringement on the part of the artist.

Given modern art's embrace of privatism, it comes as no surprise that today's artists are extroverts who are much more inclined to demand a prominent place in the artistic arena. In an era when artists attach special proprietary claims to their work (claims that tend to stem exclusively from the inner landscape of the artist's own mind), demands for a greater share of the notoriety are fully predictable. Under these conditions, the artist conceives of his work as privately owned and managed, a direct psychological extension of the artist's personal identity. No external standard is permitted to intrude upon this unity. The bond between "art" and "self" is definitive and inextricable, with the result that the canvas or sculpture, no matter the subject matter, tends to be as much about the artist as it is about the art. While Phidias remained very much behind the scenes, indentured to the aesthetic mandates prescribed by his time and place, modern artists have assigned themselves a prominence without parallel in antiquity. Not only do they assert a private right to define and redefine the meaning of art continuously, they have also claimed an unprecedented share of the artistic spotlight.

Notes

1. Here it is well to remember the mysterious spiritual qualities of beauty described by Plato in the *Phaedrus* (249d–251d) and in the *Symposium* (211–12a).

2. We tend to forget the fact that the ancient Greeks were avid and gifted painters. The last three individuals included on this list were three of the greatest.

3. These are also the kind of encomiastic assertions that irritated the philosopher Epictetus (*Discourses* 1.6.23), who rebukes his audience for counting it a great tragedy if one died before seeing the chryselephantine Zeus at Olympia.

4. The list of seven wonders was first assembled during the Hellenistic period. One of the earliest compilers was Antipater of Sidon.

5. A. Furtwängler (1895) says Phidias is the key figure in an artistic movement that will remain unrivaled for all time. P. Johansen (1924) says that Phidias achieved a degree of sublimity in his works never again attained by any artist. Similarly, B. Rowland (1963) claims that the works of master artists such as Phidias shook the souls of Michelangelo, Goethe, Shelley, and Byron.

6. The term "acrolithic" refers to a sculpture composed of a tree trunk sheathed in metal with extremities made of stone.

7. Strabo (8.3.30) claims that Panaenus was Phidias' nephew, not brother.

8. This famous painting was also attributed to Polygnotus and Micon.

9. Pausanias (5.11.3) relates a similar story involving the Olympian Zeus. He claims that the artist sculpted the image of Pantarces, a young love interest, on the statue.

10. Furtwängler dismisses Plutarch's entire version of Phidias' end as "a foolish and meaningless invention."

11. For a more detailed statement on the historical development of Greek art, the reader is directed to chapter 3 of my *Song of Hellas* (2004), to which much of the current section is indebted.

12. The term "Cycladic" means "those in a circle" and refers to a cluster of small Aegean islands situated around Delos, the sacred island of Apollo. The exact identity of these early islanders remains uncertain.

13. Perhaps the best reproduction of this canonical piece is found in the National Archeological Museum at Naples.

14. The time following the classical period is known as the Hellenistic era and although there was still some very impressive art being produced, the era of Phidian idealism had ended. The more banal rhythms of daily life were taken up as *ethos*, which increasingly gave way to *pathos*.

15. This term refers to Greek colonists who retained their original citizenship despite having physically relocated from the mother city. The colony itself, which was not a completely independent political entity, was known as a *cleruchy*.

16. However, Aelius Aristeides (*Oration* 17–53) only ranks the Lemnia fourth among the masterpieces of Phidias. In his view, the Olympian Zeus, the Parthenos, and the Athena Promachus were all superior works.

17. Other modern museum pieces we believe represent copies of Phidian originals include the Sappho-Ourania, the Kassel Apollo, and the Mattei-Sciarra Amazon.

18. Phidias is best known for the Parthenos at Athens and the Olympian Zeus, but we know he also created a third colossal chryselephantic work known as the Aphrodite Ourania at Elis (see K.D.S. Lapatin, *Chryselephantine Statuary*, 119).

19. Cutting ivory was a highly specialized skill in itself. Those proficient in this craft were known in antiquity as *elephantotó moi*.

20. In order to maintain the statue's flesh-like appearance, artists would have to make provision for some means of supporting proper humidity levels — essential to prevent cracking and splitting. This explains the presence of pools of water or oil in the immediate vicinity of the statue. It also explains why these works periodically received olive oil rub-downs (see Pausanias 4.13.6).

21. The Nike figures in Phidias' works can be thought of as "statuettes" only in relation to the colossal figures, since these miniatures were at least six feet tall.

22. This term means "virgin" in Greek and was used as a shorthand reference to the goddess Athena. The word "Parthenon" means "apartment of the virgin."

23. A full-size replication of the Parthenos has been created by Alan LeQuire, minus the ivory and gold, and stands inside the Nashville Parthenon in Nashville, Tennessee.

24. Temptations to appropriate this massive stock of gold apparently proved irresistible to the tyrant Lachares, who stripped the goddess of her gilded vestments in 297 B.C.

25. Regarding the statue's immensity, Strabo (8.3.30) suggests that Phidias may have miscalculated the statue's proportions. He states that although the god was seated, his head nearly touched the roof. A similar observation is also made by Pausanias (5.11.9).

26. Strabo (8.3.30) reports that the inspiration for the Phidian Zeus' imagery came from Homer (*Iliad* 1.528): "Cronion spoke, and nodded assent with his dark brows, and then the ambrosial locks flowed streaming from the lord's immortal head, and he caused great Olympus to quake."

27. For example, W. Craven in *Art Quarterly* 26 (1963): 429–40, and J.S. Crawford in the *American Art Journal* 11 (1979): 38–52.

28. Perhaps the closest we come to such statements are the views presented in two of Plato's dialogues — *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* — and in Aristotle's *Poetics*.

29. Perhaps no other thinker expressed this magic with greater passion than the Neoplatonist Plotinus, who, in describing the spiritual apprehension of beauty, speaks of "wonder and a shock of delight and longing and passion and a happy excitement" (*Enneads* 1.6.4).

30. The etymology of this term is suggestive. It is derived from German and means "trash."

31. Marcel Duchamp likened the creation of art to masturbation.

32. Regarding the issue of artistic subjectivism, one is reminded of an observation offered by Goethe: "Epochs which are regressive, and in the processes of dissolution are always subjective, whereas the trend in all progressive epochs is objective."

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9

Gorgias (483–376 B.C.)

Master of the Word

Gorgias, the son of Charmantides, was a native of Leontini on the island of Sicily and a major figure in the sophist movement, an intellectual ferment dating from the mid–5th century that profoundly altered Greek civilization. As a young man he may have studied with the natural philosopher Empedocles, but like most sophists, Gorgias had little concern for the "sky above or the earth below." Instead, the sophists tended to focus their interests on a wide range of concretely human issues. Above all, they were pioneers in exploring and unleashing the potent energies of language — a field in which Gorgias distinguished himself as a preeminent master. Indeed, in his *Lives of the Sophists* (481) Philostratus credits Gorgias not only with inventing the art of extemporized speech but also with launching the sophistic movement itself. The brilliance and novelty of Gorgias' elocution were dramatically displayed in 427 B.C. when, on a diplomatic junket to Athens, his spellbinding rhetoric completely enthralled the Athenians. His talents are illustrated further by the roster of notable figures he is said to have influenced (e.g., Thucydides, Agathon, Antisthenes, Alcidamas, Pericles, Alcibiades, Critias, and so on) and by the enormous wealth his instruction reportedly earned him.[1] After his "victory" at Athens, he spent 35 years teaching at the Thessalian city of Larissa. According to Pausanias (6.17), the final days of Gorgias' very long life[2] were spent at the court of Jason of Pherae.

The great sophists of the 5th century B.C. were a loosely affiliated group of free-thinkers — as nomadic in their intellectual habits as they were in their personal itineraries. The record of their views and activities reveal little in terms of canonical doctrines or obligatory credos. Accordingly, it is best not to conceive of sophistry as a formal school or sect. The following sketches will illustrate the range and diversity of the sophists interests.

Protagoras of Abdera was one of the movement's leading figures. He was among the first to challenge Eleatic epistemology and, in particular, the distinction between truth and falsity. In his view, falsehood and contradiction were impossible because there were no universal standards available to man, each individual being the sole authority in determining "truth" (*Theaetetus* 152a). All considerations of Truth and Being were, therefore, barren and useless exercises, wasted energy better spent in identifying things good and serviceable. Protagoras was also a pioneer in the study of grammar and reportedly invented a system of sentence classification as well as a means of distinguishing the gender of nouns (see Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 3.5). Protagoras was perhaps best known for his notorious claim that he could make the weaker argument, the stronger.

Another central figure among the sophists was Hippias of Elis, a renowned polymath who reportedly offered instruction in a myriad of fields, including astronomy, geometry, arithmetic, grammar, music, genealogy, history, and mythology. He is said to have created a system of mnemonics, which accounts for his prodigious memory. In addition, Hippias was credited with discovering the curve known as the "quadratrix" used to square the circle and to trisect rectilinear angles. He also advocated belief in an ecumenical divine law stressing a common humanity.

Prodicus of Ceos was a wordsmith and teacher (see *Crat*. 384b) famous for his razor-fine lexical distinctions. In an epideictic speech attributed to him (Xenophon, *Mem*. 2.1.21–34), Prodicus extols honor and discipline as the keys to a successful life. He is also said to have advanced a theory of religious origins that anticipated Euhemerism.[3]

Antiphon the Athenian[4] was famous for his aggressive distinction between man-made laws (*nomos*) and natural law (*phusis*), censoring the former as a kind of tyranny imposed upon the higher mandates of *phusis*. Like Hippias, Antiphon espoused a cosmopolitan view of human relations that rejected traditional distinctions between Greek and barbarian.[5] There is also evidence that Antiphon was a nominalist to the extent that he believed abstract terms and concepts were nothing more than groundless theorizing. Some have also argued that Antiphon was the first psychotherapist (e.g., Guthrie 3:290–91), and there are reports he operated a clinic of sorts at Corinth based on the principle that words can have the same salubrious effect upon the mind that drugs have upon the body.[6]

These brief summaries illustrate that the sophistic movement was comprised of innumerable components. From psychology to legal theory, from religion to theory of knowledge, the sophists were prepared to examine, challenge, and reformulate any and all facets of Hellenic thought. Still, for all

their diversity, there were a handful of core premises and approaches that collectively represent a kind of sophistic worldview, in the absence of which the movement would never have impacted Greek civilization as it did. One of the main unifying features of sophistry was a revolt against Presocratic philosophy — specifically, the failure of men such as Heraclitus and Parmenides to formulate mutually consistent portraits of the phenomenal world. In response to the speculative impasse engendered by their predecessors, the sophists elected to reject cosmology and metaphysics in favor of this-worldly considerations. In other words, they abandoned the quest for first principles. Earlier, the emphasis had been on the "object" (nature); now, the sophists advanced the "subject" (man) as the new priority. As a result, the sophists no longer pursued "the one in the many," but instead sought to understand the scope and limitations of human understanding, the origins and foundations of society, and the nature of law and morality. In short, the sophists charted a new course in the history of Hellenic speculation that was empirical, pragmatic, and human-centered as never before.

Given these new humanistic orientations, it is not surprising that a second unifying theme of the sophistic movement involved the communicative instrument the Greeks deemed emblematic of human essence[7] — language (more precisely, the art of persuasive speech known as rhetoric). Indeed, in a very real sense, eloquence came to function as a kind of general subtext for the entire sophistic movement, commanding the attention of virtually every major sophist.

Historically, there were solid precedents for such interests. Indeed, the Greek fascination with *logos* stretched back to the very foundations of Hellas. Homer, for instance, had described the ideal man as a doer of deeds and a "speaker of words" (*Iliad* 9.443), and he specifically offered two paradigms — Nestor, the sagacious greybeard whose words "ran sweeter than honey" (*Iliad* 1.247–48), and Odysseus, whose utterances fell irresistibly "like the wintry snows" (*Iliad* 3.220–23). We are also told by Pausanias (1.22.3) that Theseus, the legendary founder of Athens, established a cult to *Peitho* (persuasion) in most ancient times. And in his *Suppliant Maidens* (1040), Aeschylus describes Peitho as the charmer to whom nothing is denied. What distinguishes sophistry's involvement with the language arts from earlier assessments is this: whereas Homer and the other poets instinctively appreciated the mysterious power of *logos*, the sophists, for the first time in human history, made language an object of sustained scientific analysis and development. In their hands, language ceased to operate as a reflexive response to man's communicative needs and was converted instead to a true *technē* (art).

In his *Brutus* (46–47), Cicero describes the circumstances under which

rhetoric came into existence. The Roman orator traces the origins of eloquence to the Greek city-state of Syracuse, where, after the expulsion of the tyrants, a flood of citizens sought recovery of their property in the popular courts. In response, Corax and Tisias offered instruction in the art of rhetorical presentation as an aid to those seeking restitution. Significantly, this process occurred simultaneously with the growth and development of democratic institutions in the Greek world, including Athens, where citizens came to enjoy the privilege of *isegoria* (i.e., a right to speak on affairs of state). Effective public speaking became an imperative of the new political culture and, as a result, masters of discourse such as Gorgias not only amassed huge fortunes, they also left an indelible mark upon the literary, oratorical, and pedagogic traditions of European civilization.

Gorgias is the ideal illustration of these linguistic developments for several reasons. First, he is the only sophist for whom we have more than a few fragments of surviving literature. Two complete epideictic speeches remain, plus a treatise titled *On Not-Being*[8] and part of an *epitaphios* (funeral oration). Second, Gorgias was generally acknowledged as the greatest of the *logodaedaloi*, or masters of speech. Indeed, according to Philostratus, his name became synonymous with eloquence itself; anyone practicing the art was said to "Gorgianize" (*gorgiazein*). In great measure, Gorgias' reputation as a virtuoso speechmaker was the result of the remarkable care with which he chose and assembled his words. The imaginative use of rhetorical schemes such as antithesis, anadiplosis, parisosis, homoeoteleuton, isocolon, and so forth lent his works an extraordinary rhythm and euphony best described as a kind of prose poetry. Not everyone found Gorgias' euphuistic style appropriate, however, and he was criticized by a variety of later commentators (Aristotle, Cicero, Dionysius of Halicarnassus) as intemperately verbose. Beyond matters of style, Gorgias and his fellow sophists were also derided on more substantive grounds, particularly by Plato, who denies the status of *technē* to the rhetorical enterprise of men like Gorgias.[9]

While Plato's many reproofs greatly prejudiced subsequent assessments of the Leontinian and his colleagues, the fact remains that there is more to Gorgias than purple prose and bombast. For one thing, he provides keen insight on the irresistible psychological effects language has upon humankind, particularly in terms of cognitive function. These points are made, above all, in the display speech titled *Encomium of Helen*, in which Gorgias seeks to acquit the adulterous queen of Sparta based on the power of words. Helen cannot be held responsible for her misdeeds because she was bewitched, enchanted, and mesmerized by the seductive tones of her persuader. In effect, Gorgias argues that before she was ravished by Paris, she was "taken by

words"—the victim of a witchcraft tantamount to auditory rape. Helen was helpless to resist this captivation:

> Speech is a powerful lord, who
> with the finest and most invisible body
> achieves the most divine works:
> it can stop fear and banish grief
> and create joy and nurture pity [Dillon 79].

It is as if words are *entheoi* (full of gods). They penetrate the human soul and magically shape and reshape belief (*Helen* 10). It is for this reason Gorgias does not profess a capacity to instill abiding assets such as *areté* (virtue). The soul is too pliant, too susceptible to alteration in the face of beguilement, for claims such as these.[10] *Logos* can create or dissolve belief, alter conduct, and even recast the soul's understanding of "reality" in some sense (see below). But it is not within the capacity of *logos* to turn the eye of the soul toward some immutable Truth that permanently transfigures the human psyche.

Given our psychic fluidity and the mystifying effect of words, Gorgias believed rhetoric, not dialectic, was the queen of the "sciences." All of these premises point directly to a relativistic epistemology and, indeed, Gorgias must be numbered among those who understood knowledge as partial, contingent, and situational.[11] Compelling evidence for these views is contained in Gorgias' *On Not-Being* (or *On Nature*), where the sophist offers the following propositions: (1) nothing exists; (2) if something did exist, we would not be able to apprehend it; (3) if we could grasp it, we would not be able to communicate it to others.

These provocative assertions have been interpreted by scholars in a variety of ways. Some have argued that Gorgias is offering a *reductio ad absurdum* of Eleatic dialectics, that *On Not-Being* is a dazzling, parodic demonstration designed to farcically reduce the likes of Zeno and Melissus (see *Gorgias*, Diels, fr. 12). Others see more in Gorgias' treatise than whimsical polemic, deeming the work a serious declaration of philosophic nihilism, perhaps a specific attempt to radically deflate the epistemic pretensions of dogmatic rationalists. More recently, scholars have suggested another explanation, claiming that Gorgias is neither spoofing his intellectual opponents nor mounting an eristic assault against the possibility of epistemic certainty. Instead, some now believe the objective of *On Not-Being* is to unveil a new theory of knowledge mediated and conditioned by language (e.g., McComiskey, chapters 2 and 3).

It is safe to say that Gorgias was not a nihilist in matters of epistemology, but he was critical of those claiming some privileged access to what Jacques Derrida calls the "metaphysics of presence" (i.e., a truth and reality beyond the consciousness of man that remains unaltered by human perception). In

Gorgias' opinion, language is incapable of accessing any such immutable reality; *logos* cannot convey *to pragma* (the thing itself). The point is made tellingly in *On Not-Being* (84):

> For the means by which we indicate is speech (*logos*), and speech is not identical with the really subsistent things; therefore we do not indicate to our neighbors the existent things but speech, which is other than what subsists.

The implication of this Gorgianic surmise is clear—*logos* is not revelatory of Being because the signifier can never fully convey the signified. Indeed, to his way of thinking, it may be more accurate to say that words are less the signs of things than the things are the signs of words. Accordingly, there can be no pure noetic insights, no metaphysical disclosures. The most language can do is "re-present" Being, and, as a result, Gorgias believed all "reality" was in some sense meta-reality.

Given the proposition that there are no immaculate perceptions communicable by language, it follows that a certain humility must accompany all knowledge claims. Everything we understand, everything we designate as "true," is part of linguistically conditioned experience, which is to say our standards of validity must always be seen as putative and propositional. This is necessarily the case because truth is not the result of discovery as much as of manufacture, and it is this fabricative quality that allows Gorgias to legitimately speak of the extraordinary attributes of *logos*. For Gorgias, language is not simply the chief instrument of human communication; it must also be understood ontologically and epistemologically because words structure the soul in ways that determine our perception of truth and reality (*Helen* 14). Moreover, in the absence of transcendental signifiers, opinion and the *technē* that shapes it (rhetoric) become the primary source of human intelligibility. If, then, it is the case that language constitutes the foundation of human understanding, that our grasp of reality is the product of discourse, then *logos* is precisely what Gorgias claimed a *dynastes megas* (a powerful lord).

Sophist Legacy

Sophistic contributions to Western culture have long been noted by scholars. In evaluating the impact of sophistic enlightenment, Alban Lesky offered the following assessment:

> No other intellectual movement can be compared with the sophists in the permanence of its results ... the questions which they posed have never been suffered to lapse in the history of Western thought down to our own day [*History* 341].

The sophist journey was a peculiarly Icarian flight — impetuous, innovative, controversial. Not only were the sophists responsible for a myriad of provocative new perspectives in areas such as ethics, law, politics, psychology, and theory of knowledge, they also advanced an unprecedented critical consciousness that became a defining feature of the West's intellectual tradition. Indeed, were it not for the sophists, much of the so-called "Greek Miracle" would be inconceivable. In particular, it is impossible to imagine the accomplishments of Socrates, Plato, or Aristotle in the absence of sophistic groundbreaking.

Beyond these general endowments, there are also a variety of more precise cultural contributions attributable to Gorgias and his colleagues, not the least of which is a revolutionary new understanding of *paideia* (education, culture, etc.). Indeed, the sophists were the first thinkers in Western history to formulate a coherent theory, philosophy, and method of education (Jaeger, 1:293). Much of this achievement centered around a new understanding of the term *areté*, or virtue. Traditionally, the Greeks believed virtue was in the veins (i.e., a matter of blood lineage). According to this logic, ancestral pedigree was the prime determinant of a man's excellence and, therefore, the exclusive possession of the *aristoi*. The sophists, however, rejected the idea that virtue was a matter of genetics, arguing instead that *areté* was the result of knowledge and therefore an acquirable characteristic. By substituting *didache* (instruction) in place of *phusis* (nature), the sophists not only broke the aristocratic monopoly on claims of excellence, they also promoted a "democratized" notion of culture and learning. In principle, all men could benefit from education, regardless of class or family background. These views were of inestimable importance to the extent that they rendered education a "public"[12] affair for the first time in history.

In addition, the sophists were responsible for greatly expanding the customary curriculum of ancient Greece and, by extension, the Western world. For centuries Greek learning was comprised of three basic elements: literature, music (including poetry), and physical training. These studies fell under the pedagogic jurisdiction of the *grammatistes*, the *kitharistes*, and the *paidotribes*, respectively. They produced a "gentleman" (*kaloskagathos*) who knew how to use a stylus, string a lyre, and cleanse himself with a strigil. This was knightly learning, aimed less at intellectual development and more at the formation of innate qualities bestowed by inheritance. What we would today term "advanced" academic studies were virtually unknown until the sophists introduced a spate of new subjects, including mathematics, astronomy, geography, history, military tactics, ethics, music, drawing, painting, and mnemonics. It has also been suggested that several modern academic disciplines, such as psychology and political science, have their origins with the sophists (de Romilly

90), and that the sophists' pioneering ethnographic studies are the ultimate point of origin for Europe's sociological imagination. Much, then, of the variegated curriculum we have today had its origins in sophistic innovation.

No doubt the greatest and most enduring aspect of the sophist legacy involves their systematic investigation of language — a field in which Gorgias achieved special prominence. The sophistic movement represents the precise moment when language took on a life of its own and became a distinct branch of knowledge. From this point on, *logos* was the object of an intense and unprecedented scientific development. Among their many achievements in this field, the sophists distinguished the various parts of speech, delineated the gender of nouns, identified the moods and tenses of verbs, established exacting standards for the proper use of cognate terms, and were among the first to recognize both the existential and the predicative senses of the word "is." These achievements, and many others, oblige us to identify the sophists as the founding grammarians and philologists in Western culture.

Above all, the sophists must be credited with creating that meticulously choreographed assemblage of words known as "rhetoric." For more than 2,000 years, rhetorical studies, in one form or another, stood at the center of Western learning. Stylistically speaking, the honeyed tongues of men such as Gorgias had a profound effect upon the literary and oratorical traditions of European civilization. Gorgias' genius inspired the pedagogic activities of Isocrates, who in turn determined much of the substance and method of Latin learning. Indeed, Cicero's *De Oratore*, Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, and Cornificius' *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* manifestly illustrate Rome's indebtedness to sophist literary and oratorical techniques. These same works went on to inform and inspire the homiletic activities of the early Christian Church and are particularly prevalent in the works of St. Paul, whose letters are fraught with rhetorical devices, and St. Augustine, who actually taught rhetoric prior to his conversion (see his *De Doctrina Christiana*, especially chapter 4). They also served as instructional templates for many medieval rhetoricians (Cassiodorus, Capella, and Isidore are prime examples) and later helped shape much of Renaissance learning by influencing humanists such as Erasmus and his disciple, Juan Luis Vives. The burnished styles of modern litterateurs, including John Milton, Edmund Burke, and John Ruskin, are further testaments to the effects ancient eloquence has had upon European literary conventions.

Today the florid strains of Gorgias' "grand" style would probably not enjoy the adulation they received at Athens in 427 B.C. One suspects the modern ear would be far less tolerant of his versified prose, and more inclined to reject them as superfluous contrivances contributing little or nothing to meaning. However, stylistic disconnects notwithstanding, no one should conclude

from this that the voice of the great Leontinian has fallen silent in our era. Quite the contrary. Ours is an age in which the mesmeric effects of language may be more prevalent than ever. From the speechmaking of our politicians[13] to the sermonizing of our religious leaders, to the litigious theatrics of our courtrooms, to the evasive hedging of our spin doctors, to the designing phrases of our advertisers, the ubiquity of rhetoric in modern times cannot be denied. For this reason, one can legitimately assert that the verbal thaumaturgy of Gorgias continues to live.

In addition, one could legitimately argue that all those who have systematically considered the loom of language — such as Wittgenstein, Whorf, Chomsky, and Derrida — are, in some sense, to be understood as "neosophists," protégés of those originative linguistic masters who in the 5th century B.C. transformed human communication forever. Moreover, it is also the case that certain key principles of Gorgias' teachings have become essential features of our postmodern, nominalized world — specifically, his rejection of categorical truth claims and his insistence that our grasp of mutable reality is largely the result of the mediating powers of the "word." In advancing these views, Gorgias directly anticipated many of the central premises of the deconstructionists, postmodern critical theorists, and neopragmatists. Thinkers such as Kenneth Burke, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Paul de Man, Jonathan Culler, and Richard Rorty are, each in their own way, the distant progeny of Gorgias who, along with his sophist associates, first roused *logos* from its unreflective slumber, converting language into a technical discipline for the first time in history.

Notes

1. Isocrates (*Antidosis* 155) claims Gorgias was the wealthiest of all sophists. Cf. Plato, *Meno* 91d.

2. Estimates of Gorgias' age vary. Some sources claim he was 109 years old at the time of his death.

3. The belief that the gods were actually based upon human models such as great kings and others who had rendered important benefits to the community.

4. The precise identity of Antiphon remains a matter of scholarly debate — there were several Antiphons.

5. Antiphon observed, "We are all by nature born the same in every way, both barbarians and Hellenes" (Diels, fr. 44).

6. In his *Encomium of Helen* (14), Gorgias makes this exact point. Antiphon is listed among those influenced by the great rhetorician.

7. A point made by Isocrates — see *Antidosis* 253–54.

8. Another version of this treatise has been preserved among the works of Aristotle, titled *On Melissus, Xenophanes, Gorgias*.

9. Plato registered a variety of objections against the sophists — not all of which were entirely fair or legitimate. In almost all instances, his criticisms related to issues of

epistemology. He did not, for example, view rhetoric as a true art but rather as a kind of flattery (*kolakeia*) or pseudo-*technē* (*Gorgias* 464c–d). He also challenged the liquid notion of verity advanced by Gorgias and others who tended to reduce truth to a matter of verbal wizardry. Above all, Plato was radically opposed to sophist relativism. Unlike the sophists, he did not believe issues of value and worth were determined by referendum. Rather, these matters involved abiding and universal essences (the Ideas or Forms) that awaited human discovery, not human sanction. Thus, while Plato refrained from indicting the great sophists as malicious and evil men, he was strongly inclined to condemn them as misguided teachers who offered word-juggling and specious reasoning as substitutes for knowledge and truth (see also Aristotle, *Soph. Ref.* 165a).

10. See Plato's *Meno* 95c. In rejecting claims to instill virtue, Gorgias was an atypical member of the sophistic movement.

11. This also explains the significance of *kairos* for Gorgias. The term refers to "opportunity" or "moment" and suggests that truth is largely a matter of occasion. Rhetoricians must, therefore, remain poised on the balls of their feet, waiting for the precise instant when they can register their arguments most effectively. If one possessed truth in a Platonic sense, anytime would be the "right" time to advance one's premise.

12. Of course, many were excluded from educational opportunities, including women, slaves, and the very poor. Still, the idea that human excellence was a matter of enculturation, not class or ethnicity, was a sophistic conception of immense significance (see Isocrates, *Panath.* 50).

13. Some of the most highly regarded political speeches in American history have been laden with rhetorical devices. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, for instance, speaks of "government of the people, by the people, for the people"—an example of asyndeton designed to convey an accelerated sense of rhythm. Similarly, John F. Kennedy's famous admonition to "ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country" is an example of antithesis, one of the most frequently employed of all rhetorical schemes.

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10

Socrates (469–399 B.C.)

Iconoclast and Moral Revolutionary

It would be difficult to overstate the historic significance of the Athenian philosopher, Socrates. In fact, there are those who argue that with the exception of Jesus, Socrates is the most influential figure in Western civilization, a view promoted by Friedrich Nietzsche, who described him as "the turning point and vortex" of world history. That any single person could exert such authority is remarkable in itself, but that a man of Socrates' rank and status should come to enjoy such iconic stature is truly extraordinary. In this regard, it is important to note the long and enduring aristocratic shadow the Homeric tradition (see chapter 1) continued to cast throughout the classical era. Significantly, none of the illustrious figures who fought at Troy were men of the people. They may have had blood on their hands, but they did not have dirt beneath their fingernails. All were members of the *aristoi*, men of substance with distinguished lineages often traceable to the gods themselves.

Then there was Socrates, more akin to the likes of Thersites than to Agamemnon. His father and mother were of working-class background, the former a stonemason and the latter a midwife. As was customary, Socrates practiced the craft of his father, which meant that, like all those who worked with their hands, Socrates bore a certain stigma as a *banausikos*.[1] In terms of specific socioeconomic background, Socrates was a member of the middle class. This can be safely assumed because he qualified as a *hoplite* during the Peloponnesian War. These heavily armored infantrymen were required to purchase their own armor, an impossible financial burden for those of the lowest socio economic rank. In addition to his modest economic and social status, it seems Socrates was also a most unimpressive physical specimen. In his *Symposium* (5.4–7) Xenophon describes Socrates as having a broad, flat nose, thick lips, bulging eyes, and a pot belly. It seems, too, that Socrates had a rather

peculiar gait, strange enough to have prompted independent commentary from Aristophanes and Plato. Given these unenviable characteristics, the question remains: How did this improbable candidate for cultural stardom achieve his status as one of the immortals of Western culture?

This is not an easy question to answer for a variety of reasons, chief of which is the fact that Socrates left behind no writings we can call his own — no treatises, no dialogues, no compositions of any kind. In truth, it must be admitted that all we claim to know about Socrates is based entirely upon the refracted imagery of authors such as Aristophanes, Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle, and a variety of later doxographers. There is little solid evidence, therefore, upon which scholars can rely in their attempts to decode the life and teachings of this peculiar little man, and it is for this reason that we continue to speak of the "Socratic Problem." It is essential, therefore, that the speculative nature of any effort to grasp the "historic" Socrates be fully acknowledged. More, we must continuously ask whose portrait of Socrates we are relying upon as we formulate our own conclusions.[2]

Needless to say, the "Socratic Problem" has greatly compounded attempts to identify the substance of this renowned philosopher's thinking. There are, however, certain recurring themes that collectively constitute what most scholars believe is the "core" Socratic message. First and foremost, Socrates presents a new moral perspective that departs radically from traditional Greek beliefs. Unlike the ancient Homeric ethic, where "helping friends and harming enemies" was the extent of one's moral obligation, Socrates brought a new intellectualism to the moral domain, asserting that wisdom and virtue were fundamentally identical. In other words, if one truly understood the "good," if a person had a clear grasp of its meaning and implications for the life worth living, he would never willingly elect to do evil. This is so because everyone seeks joy in life, and virtue, according to Socrates, is the key to all genuine happiness. When, therefore, people are seen to engage in unrighteous acts, it is not because they are naturally wicked, nor is it the result of having been overwhelmed by passion. These individuals choose the wrong course in life because they are simply unfamiliar with the proper path. This view of morality has often been associated with the "Socratic paradoxes" — specifically, knowledge equals virtue or, put another way, well-knowing results in well-doing, which in turn ensures well-being.[3]

In addition to his moral cognitivism, Socrates has also been credited with a closely related doctrine of the human soul. Although much of Socrates' contribution in this area has not been properly appreciated, in truth, our notion of "soul," an idea that has dominated Western religious and philosophic speculation for 2,400 years, is, to a great degree, Socratic.[4] Prior to

Socrates, the Greeks, as well as most other ancient peoples, tended to view the soul as simply a "life-force"—a pneumatic specter responsible for physical animation. According to these views, death occurred when the soul, prompted by injury, disease, or old age, elected to vacate its somatic dwelling. For Socrates, however, the soul apparently represented more than simply the source from which the *soma* derives its vitality. Drawing upon a variety of antecedents, including certain Orphic-Pythagorean traditions, Socrates advanced the idea of an "ego" soul (i.e., the soul conceived as the center of personality and character). In some sense, then, Socrates may have been the first to systematically assert the soul's status as the true "self," the center of personal consciousness and identity. As such, he believed the soul was vastly superior to the body, which, in comparison, was little more than a receptacle or husk and therefore unworthy of the concern so often lavished upon it. The true priority and ultimate consideration in life was, according to Socrates, the proper tendance of the *psyché*, a necessary premise given our fundamental identity as "soul creatures."

In a move that would forever alter the Western philosophic tradition, Socrates proceeded to merge his moral theory with his concept of soul. In order to achieve the *eudaemonic* existence (i.e., the felicitous life all people instinctively seek), Socrates believed it was essential to maintain a certain pneumatic discipline. This soul regimen required a strict dedication to righteousness because virtue, according to Socrates, is the nourishment that sustains the human soul. Conversely, vice and wickedness are defined by Socrates as psychic toxins that defile and weaken the true self. One must be vigilant, therefore, in guarding against acts of injustice because all such conduct, while it may ostensibly seem deleterious only to the victim, is in fact more harmful to the evildoer. This even includes iniquities that go undetected and unpunished.[5] It is in this sense that the unjust man is the author of his own misery—every act of venality being a self-inflicted spiritual wound. It is also the reason why a man such as Socrates, who has scrupulously cared for his soul by avoiding harm to others, can never be victimized by the likes of Meletus and Anytus.[6] As Socrates is heard to say in Plato's *Apology*, no real evil can befall a man of unblemished soul because the most telling injuries of life, the sort that threaten our basic identity as human beings, involve damage to the inner person, and we alone are the source of such impairments.

Had his contribution to our culture extended no further than the pneumatic moral theory, Socrates' place in the pantheon of Western luminaries would still have been assured, but Socrates also endowed our civilization with something of far greater significance, something that would come to uniquely characterize the Western tradition—a passion for truth. All that we know of

Socrates indicates he was a dedicated and intrepid seeker of enlightenment. In addition, it seems he was keenly aware of the ease with which convention and traditional perspectives numb and delimit the minds of men. In allowing the deadweight of conventional belief to tyrannize, Socrates believed we not only indenture ourselves to shadow and apparition, we also participate in a life unfit for rational beings. Rather than stitch our own mental straitjackets, Socrates insisted that we continuously test and certify "truth." Only by these means, he believed, could the sovereign flame of reason burn with its proper intensity.

In sum, the Socratic legacy is ultimately unrelated to any particular doctrine or school of thought. Rather, his gift involves a kind of mental hygiene by which the mind is continuously scrubbed clean of presumptions, received opinions, and untested truths. By advancing this approach, Socrates not only conferred upon the West that restive, critical spirit that differentiates the Occident from other cultures, he also registered a faith in the capability of truth to emancipate us from the incarcerative effects of ignorance, fraud, and violence. Socrates' fidelity to this credo accounts for many of the details of his life, including the *elenctic*[7] combat he waged against the conceit of knowledge and, above all, his willingness to pursue truth no matter how inconvenient, disquieting, or perilous the quest. Moreover, it explains his status as one of the initiating voices in the "Great Conversation," where his famed admonition—"The unexamined life is not worth living"—remains as urgently valid today as it was 2,400 years ago.[8]

Notes

1. This term bespeaks the social prejudice of a slave culture toward anyone doing physical labor. It specifically connotes inferior or servile status.

2. In what follows, the bulk of the analysis relies upon the portraiture presented in the Platonic dialogues—our most extensive source. See B. Jowett trans., *The Dialogues of Plato*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967).

3. Today we are much more inclined to accept the discontinuities between knowing the good and actually doing the good.

4. An assessment offered by W. Burkert in *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), especially V1.2.3

5. This is a chief theme in Plato's *Gorgias*—see 477a–481a.

6. The lead prosecutors at Socrates' trial who succeeded in securing a death sentence against their opponent, assuming, therefore, that they had "harmed their enemy."

7. This term refers to the cross-examination to which Socrates subjects his interlocutors in the Platonic dialogues.

8. Socrates' intrepid inquiries included the *mos maiorum* of his native Athens. He was the first thinker in Western history alert to the oppressive narrowness of custom (i.e., to the necessity of scrutinizing even the most hallowed opinions and practices). Socrates' mission as the gadfly of Athens was, therefore, to roil the minds of his fellow citizens on a continuous basis.

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11

Thucydides (460–399 B.C.)

True Father of History

In a famous interview granted the *Chicago Tribune* in 1916, Henry Ford disparagingly declared, "History is more or less bunk." He then went on to assert that the only history that really matters is the history we make today. In other words, the study of history is a barren endeavor that not only yields little or nothing of real value but also distracts from the business at hand, which is to focus on the concrete necessities of the moment. Dismissively pragmatic sentiments such as these were entirely predictable from one of America's great captains of industry. They reflect a pervasive impatience in American society with any activity that seems slow to bear tangible fruit. By this logic, the best that can be said of history is that it constitutes a kind of dissipative hobby. What Mr. Ford, and others who share his views, would undoubtedly deny is history's ability to materially enhance the human condition.

These views are entirely at odds with the ancient Greek understanding of the term "history." Above all, they are absolutely contrary to the ideas of Thucydides, the man who elevated the ways and means of historical inquiry to new heights and who is, in truth, the most worthy claimant of the title *Pater historiae*. In his opinion, properly conducted historical research was profoundly worthwhile to the extent that it was capable of disclosing the patterns and tendencies that continuously shape human events. History enjoyed this capacity because the most powerful feature underlying historical process was a dynamic whose constancy Thucydides found impossible to question — human nature. As a result, history provides both an extraordinary opportunity to trace the likely course of future events and a means of identifying the root psychological forces that impel the flow of history. It is specifically these prognostic and analytical potentials that convinced the Greeks of history's value.

It not only supplied meaningful details of past experience, it also had the potential (pace Henry Ford) to serve as a useful guide to the future.

Thucydides was an Athenian citizen born around 460 B.C. His father's name, Olorus, suggests Thracian descent. It is also believed Thucydides was in some way related to Cimon, the Athenian statesman and soldier, whose mother, Hegesipylē, was Thracian. We know, too, that Thucydides owned property in Thrace. During the early phases of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides was afflicted with the plague that ravaged Athens. Unlike many others, Thucydides survived this deadly malady and went on to be elected one of the ten *strategoi* in the year 424. It was in this capacity that he was charged with preventing Sparta from seizing the city of Amphipolis, an Athenian colony of major commercial and strategic significance. Unfortunately for the historian, the city fell in a daring winter assault led by the Spartan general Brasidas. In response to this failure, the Athenians banished Thucydides for twenty years. He returned to the city at the end of the war in 404 B.C. The precise manner and time of his death cannot be determined, although one tradition suggests that he was assassinated. It seems likely that he died around 399 B.C., given the fact that nothing in his writing indicates a knowledge of key 4th-century events such as Conon's restoration of Athenian naval power (394 B.C.). His remains were placed in the family vault of the Cimonids, which remained visible at Athens as late as the 2nd century A.D.

What Is History?

The term "history" can be, and indeed has been, applied to a wide variety of activities over the span of thousands of years. If, for example, one were to define history as any effort to record events for the sake of future reference, then the work of cave dwellers at Altamira and Lascaux might qualify as a kind of Paleolithic historiography. Similarly, the mantle of history might be extended to various annalistic compilations, such as the Palermo Stele or the Gadd Chronicle. One could also argue that certain portions of the Old Testament (e.g., First Book of Kings and both Books of Samuel) are legitimately historical. But are these expansive notions of history genuinely consistent with modern understanding?

The answer to this question is generally "no," since the modern view of history is heavily indebted to Hellenism. Our term "history" comes from the Greek word *historia*, meaning "inquiry" or "investigation." This definition implies that by its very nature, "history," as conceived by the Greeks, involved activities of critical inquiry and analysis.[1] It did not seek simply to chronicle events but rather attempted to dissect and assay information in a manner

unprecedented in the ancient world. Indeed, it can be said of the Greek historians (particularly Thucydides) that they comprise an entirely new genus of historical consciousness, the specific hallmarks of which include a strenuous commitment to factual accuracy, a secular/profane view of events in which supernatural interventions are minimized or denied, and an analytical spirit insistent upon exacting appraisal of relevant data. If these standards of Hellenic historiography sound strangely contemporary, it is because they continue to function canonically as modernity's idea of authentic history. At the same time, these standards also exclude almost all that came before. The mere recording of events, no matter how extensive or detailed, does not constitute historiography.[2] Nor are the various theocratic narratives common to the ancient Oriental civilizations compliant with the criteria established by Greek historical presentation, for the simple reason that faith often obscures fact and devotion tends to preclude analysis.[3]

If, then, we were to summarize the spirit of Greek historiography, it might best be described as fundamentally consistent with the scientific outlook of the Miletians. Saying this, however, we must also note that the fervent commitment to historical truth probably came about as a result of a slow (and by no means uncontested) development. As is well known, there were certain powerful anti-historical prejudices operating in the Greek mind. These tendencies, which functioned on both an ontological and an epistemological level, must have significantly impeded the development of Greek historical consciousness. Specifically, there was a strong assumption among the Greeks that permanence is constitutive of reality, or, conversely, that the transitory is less real than the immutable. Historical events unfold in an ever-flowing temporal stream — a chronological variant of Heraclitean flux — and are therefore less genuine than the enduring aspects of reality. In addition, the Greeks also believed that the ever-changing was fundamentally defiant of human comprehension. Men cannot know that which is continuously involved in transformation; knowledge implies permanence of subject matter. In great measure, this perspective underlies the theories of both the Eleatics and Plato, and in a general sense, it also explains the Greek enthusiasm for the enduring truths of mathematical sciences.

The implications of all this for our analysis is clear — the Greek idea of history is the result of a conceptual evolution. Thucydides, who is without question the greatest figure in ancient historiography, had predecessors who helped refine and advance the techniques of historical reporting that ultimately received their consummate expression in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*. (Those unfamiliar with the key details of this conflict are directed to the appendix at the end of this chapter.) These precursive attempts at history

tended to center on three distinct subject areas: geography, genealogy, and local history. The individuals associated with these early efforts — men such as Charon, Xanthus, Acusilaus, and Hellanicus — are, for modern scholars, little more than names, given the loss of their works to time. There are, however, two historians about whom we have more information. One is Herodotus, whom Cicero dubiously designated the "father of history." But before we examine his achievements, let us review a few words about a man who no doubt influenced him, Hecataeus of Miletus.

Hecataeus (550–490 B.C.) merits our attention for several reasons. For one thing, he was the earliest *logographer* (i.e., the first to write of past events in prose). More importantly, his work, although extant only in fragments, nevertheless reveals a critical spirit that would become a prime attribute of Greek historiography. In his *Genealogies*, for example, he says, "What I write here is the account which I consider to be true: for the stories of the Greeks are numerous, and in my opinion, ridiculous." Hecataeus was fully prepared to reject and/or reinterpret ancient tales that strained belief. Accordingly, he denies the possibility that Aegyptus could have fifty sons and argues that Cerberus, the hound of Hades, was more likely reptilian than canine. These assessments do not begin to approximate the austere rationalism we eventually encounter in the pages of Thucydides, but they mark a nascent impulse toward a standard of truth without parallel in antiquity.[4]

In turning next to Herodotus, we enter a new phase in the development of historical method and insight. Happily, Herodotus has left us a fully extant and detailed account of the Persian Wars. What this work reveals is a historian who is part raconteur, anxious to entertain his reader with dazzling tales ("the great and amazing deeds displayed by both Greeks and barbarians"), yet at the same time a skeptic willing to challenge, evaluate, and reject what the mass of men find convincing. It is precisely this eccentric blend of the fantastic and the scientific that led Gibbon to observe that Herodotus sometimes writes for children and sometimes for philosophers (see also Cicero *The Laws* 1.5).

With regard to the fabulous, Herodotus, the storyteller, can rival almost anything found in the Homeric poems; for this reason, he has been described as the "Homer" of the Persian Wars by several commentators. Among other things, his penchant for the fantastic includes Arabian flying snakes (2.75), a fountain of youth among the Ethiopians (3.23), gold digging ants the size of foxes (3.102), cattle that walk backward as they graze (4.183), and a Persian army so enormous that it drinks entire rivers dry (7.21). In addition, Herodotus continues to subscribe to many traditional religious orthodoxies. He is convinced, for example, that the gods play a role in directing the affairs of men, and specifically that the hubris-nemesis dynamic is a powerful force

driving the vicissitudes of history. Moreover, Herodotus also states, in a most unequivocal manner, that he has full faith in the veracity of oracles and that he is disinclined to question their proclamations when they are expressed in unambiguous language (8.77).

For all his credulity, there are nevertheless some important and genuinely critical dimensions to Herodotus' history. In Book VII, for example, he alerts his reader to the fact that, although he feels bound to report stories that have been presented to him, he feels no obligation to believe them (7.152). Applying this principle, Herodotus is inclined to question the substance of the ancient tale regarding Minos' naval hegemony (3.122)—something that not even Thucydides was prepared to do. In addition, Herodotus also merits praise for the principled objectivity with which he portrays the non–Hellenic peoples, especially the Persians. To his credit, Herodotus does not write a chauvinist history; he admires both the culture and the courage of the Persian foe. Detachment such as this is certainly an admirable and necessary quality in a historian. As is turns out, however, these unbigoted sentiments actually earned him the enmity of certain Greek commentators. In particular, Plutarch is quick to label him a *philobarbaros*, or "lover of barbarians," while simultaneously deploring what he saw as a pro–Athenian bias in the *History*.[5]

Thucydides and the Birth of History

Despite having composed a kind of prose epic, the fact remains that Herodotus and his *History* were a necessary pre-condition for the critical/scientific achievements of Thucydides. Yet this is a point difficult to grasp as one begins to read the latter, because Thucydides' manner is so advanced, so discerning, so entirely dedicated to the presentation of corroborated fact, that one has the impression of reading a modern historian, not a man born a mere two decades or so after Herodotus. Above all, in Thucydides we encounter a historian who has completely abandoned any aspiration simply to please the ear of his reader. His purpose, instead, is didactic and toward this end, as we shall see, Thucydides makes a diligent and unremitting search for truth, the essence of his enterprise.

There are so many noteworthy dimensions to Thucydides' achievement, so much that merits detailed examination, that narrowing the range of treatment becomes a considerable challenge. One area that cannot go unassessed, however, is the *History*'s stylistic features. The prose of Thucydides is the most complex in all of Greek literature. In it we encounter elaborate parallelism, dramatic shifts in tense, and exotic new uses of words that are simply without parallel in any Greek author. These innovations, though certainly

noteworthy, are not without their difficulties. On occasion they result in wordy muddles that not only torment modern translators, but also vexed and confounded the ancient commentators.[6] The origins of these bold linguistic experiments are no doubt related to the rarefied intellectual atmosphere in which Thucydides was operating. In his day, Athens had become a haven for experimentation and heterodoxy — a city whose spirit was increasingly influenced by the innovative likes of Pericles, Anaxagoras, Phidias, Protagoras, and Euripides.[7] Traditional modes and orders could no longer restrain the provocative energies that would transform Athens into "the school of Hellas." Thucydides was very much part of the great experimentalism of the late 5th century B.C., but at the same time his innovations were couched in a literary style that remains, for all its complexity, subtle and decorous. Rarely, for example, do we find Thucydides attempting to bludgeon his reader with imperious, prescriptive statements. In fact, authorial intrusions of any kind are exceedingly rare in the *History.* What we discover, instead, is an unobtrusive instruction quietly embedded in the narrative itself that gently leads the reader to certain "necessary" conclusions.[8] It was precisely this tacit tutelage that earned Thucydides the high praise of Thomas Hobbes, who, in the preface to his translation of the historian's work, observed that "the narrative itself doth secretly instruct the reader, and more effectively than can be done by precept."

Beyond matters of style, Thucydides also merits praise for the consistent integrity of his presentation. Ancient Greece was an exceptionally contentious culture, even by modern standards. Had Thucydides used his *History* to promote a political cause, or to further some personal viewpoint, he would have been operating in a manner fully consistent with the polemical spirit of his fellow Greeks. Instead, what we find is remarkable neutrality and fairness. As an Athenian, for instance, Thucydides might have engaged in partisan presentation as he drew the battle lines between Sparta and Athens. But, in fact, he never allows his evaluative scales to tilt one way or another. The misdeeds of both people are presented fairly and accurately — the Spartan outrage against the Plataeans (3.68) is balanced by the outrageous brutality of the Athenians at Melos (5.85–116). Additionally, as a member of the Athenian aristocracy, Thucydides might naturally have evidenced an oligarchic bias in the political assessments proffered in the *History*. But here, too, Thucydides not only remains non-prejudicial in his account, he actually registers strong disapproval of the oligarchs whenever the facts demand such criticism (e.g., 6.39, 8.48, 8.65).

A further example of Thucydides' penchant for fairness is evident in his treatment of the Athenian statesman, Pericles. Thucydides was apparently related to the Philaidae, a powerful oligarchic family that claimed such famous

members as Miltiades, the hero of Marathon, and his son Cimon. In the political struggles of Athens, a fierce rivalry arose between the Philaidae and the Alcmaeonidae, a clan that backed the *demos* against the city's oligarchic elements. Pericles was a member of this rival household, but Thucydides' admiration for him is nevertheless extensive and unqualified. In fact, the portrait offered by the historian makes clear Thucydides' belief that Pericles was the greatest statesman in Greece.

A final, and perhaps more telling, illustration of the qualities of fairness and objectivity in the pages of Thucydides stems from a pivotal moment in the historian's own life. In 424 B.C. Thucydides had been chosen *strategos* (general) and assigned the task of protecting Athenian interests on the coastline of Thrace — in particular, the Athenian colony of Amphipolis.[9] Unfortunately for our historian, the city fell to the Spartan general Brasidas, which, as mentioned earlier, resulted in Thucydides' banishment for twenty years. The incredible aspect of all this lies in the manner with which Thucydides reports the unhappy details of the episode (4.104–107). One might expect that Thucydides would use this opportunity to engage in some form of exculpatory rhetoric, to shift responsibility to others, or at least to denounce the harsh penalty imposed by the Athenian people. In fact, we find none of this — no excuses, no pleading, and no protests. The methodical, dispassionate presentation of the facts is never for a moment compromised by attempts at exoneration. This relentless commitment to impartiality remains one of the most remarkable features of the work and a clear demonstration that the idea of "history" had ascended to a new and unprecedented height.

A sweeping disregard for supernatural explanation is another noteworthy feature of the *History*. Thucydides' historiographical standards are strongly secular, and as a result extra-human elements all but disappear as causal factors in the pages of his work (as opposed to Herodotus, for whom oracles, divine jealousy, and god-inspired delusion play a powerful role in explaining the dynamics of the Persian Wars). In effect, Thucydides displays a thoroughly "godless grasp of war and politics" (Hornblower 43). Indeed, one could legitimately argue that there is less metaphysical preoccupation in Thucydides than there is in the 16th-century thought of Descartes.[10]

Illustrations of Thucydides' commitment to a de-mystified view of the human condition are numerous and telling. During the *Epitaphios* (funeral oration), for instance, where one might reasonably anticipate some mention of supernatural forces, there is a conspicuous silence with regard to heaven, the gods, and religion. Similarly, the plague that devastated Athens at the war's outset is not seen as the result of providential displeasure; Thucydides notes that the same scourge had affected Ethiopia, Egypt and Libya. (This

raises the question, how might an Egyptian or Hebrew have explained this pestilence?) Moreover, the historian pointedly observes that the plague was nondiscriminating in selecting its victims. Religious scruple provided no immunity; the pious died just as readily as the wicked, an observation repeated later in Thucydides' assessment of the fate of Nicias (7.86.5). In addition, Thucydides displays little patience with the childish fears associated with certain natural phenomena such as eclipses or thunderstorms. These are either explained away in terms of natural causation — the tidal wave at Euboea was the result of an earthquake (3.89.5) — or simply dismissed out of hand.

There is one event in the *History* that, above all else, might have lent itself to supernatural explanation: the Athenian debacle at Syracuse. I suspect even some modern readers find it difficult not to ascribe this climactic episode to preternatural causes. Thucydides, however, has no trouble whatsoever in severing any causal link between the butchery at Melos, where the Athenians were guilty of a deplorable act of violence, and their disastrous defeat in Sicily. In fact, he makes clear his belief that Athenian ambitions, as unbridled as they became, still might have been achieved were it not for a series of debilitating domestic intrigues (2.65.11 and 8.89.3). All of this indicates that divine retribution had, in Thucydides' view, nothing to do with catastrophe; Melian blood did not haunt the Athenian expedition at Syracuse. For Thucydides, the weal and woe of life is determined by men, not gods.

There is no feature of Thucydides' work more admirable, more thoroughly consistent with the tenets of modern historiography, than his vehement commitment to *ekrebeia* (factual accuracy). Not only does this dedication distinguish Thucydides from all previous "historians," but in great measure it also helped establish "truth" as the standard by which all genuine history would be judged.[11] The extent of Thucydides' resolve in these matters is made plain from the very outset of the *History.* He will not invent, nor will he rely upon those who have invented. Instead, he will earnestly attempt to discover. His investigative energies are entirely committed to testing contemporary events not only because the current conflict is the "greatest motion" ever to stir the Hellenic world, but also because by making contemporary events paramount, he will have at his disposal a significant fund of concrete information that he could never hope to acquire for any earlier war (1.2). Only in this fashion will he be able to compose a proper history (i.e., one that does not rely upon poets and storytellers).[12]

Even with this approach, however, the task of recording a historically credible account of the Peloponnesian War remains challenging. This is because the majority of men are not only slow to exert themselves in ascertaining the truth, they are at the same time incurably credulous (1.20). Even

in matters of great national significance, most people are content to rely upon unfounded reports and hearsay.[13] As a corrective to these deficiencies, Thucydides informs his reader of the extraordinary measures he has taken to guarantee accuracy. In chapter twenty-two of the first book, Thucydides presents his reader with a methodological manifesto that is without precedent in the ancient world. It states that he considers it his "duty" to offer as factual only that material which has been rigorously researched and certified. He acknowledges the difficulty of relying upon eyewitness testimony, specifically noting the frequency of conflicting accounts and the possibility of prejudicial reporting. All of these factors are taken into account and laboriously weighed and balanced in an effort to arrive at the truth. With regard to his use of speeches, Thucydides readily admits these are reconstructions, but he also assures us that they adhere as closely as possible to what was actually said (1.22.1). Declarations such as these have legitimately led some to conclude that Thucydides must be credited with having written the first true *Wissenschaft*, or scientific history.

History as Pedagogy

It is no longer fashionable to expect history to yield up "lessons" by which current affairs can be gauged and future events anticipated.[14] Santayana warned that those who do not understand history are doomed to repeat past errors but modern man seems quite willing to take his chances. As a result, where history is studied at all today, the purpose is chiefly informational — dates, places, personalities. We no longer seek the grand designs and transcending principles because efforts in these directions tend to imply a willingness to tolerate mystagogy; "history" in the broad sense of Hegel or Spengler no longer seems permissible.

But what of the ancient Greeks? How did they approach historical fact versus historical principle? History viewed as a matter of factual curiosity, as simply the amassing of data, had little or no meaning for the Hellenes. Facticity per se could not command the attention, much less the enthusiasm, of the Greek mind. In and of themselves, the facts were inert and relatively useless unless some larger pattern of meaning could be extracted from the details. The instinct for such meaning is not only a feature of Greek historiography. It is, in more general terms, a deeply ingrained feature of all Greek intellect. It bespeaks a native impulse for the generic, a longing for the eternal and abiding amid the fleeting and ephemeral.

Thucydides is certainly no exception to this rule; in fact, he is paradigmatically representative of the Greek demand for *to saphes* (principles). As we

have seen, the factual integrity of Thucydides' narrative presentation is beyond serious question, but in the final analysis even these diligently validated facts are relegated to the status of ephemeral details because the ultimate aspiration of the *History* is to arrive at the governing patterns that underlie the flow of events. In other words, Thucydides uses particular data as a means of passing beyond them, all in the hope of arriving at what is universal and permanent. It is this desire to arrive at the larger, more lasting postulates that not only determines certain stylistic features of the work[15] but also lends the *History* a conceptual, philosophical quality that makes Thucydides something more than merely a gatherer of facts. In some sense, then, Thucydides defies Aristotle's classic distinction between history and poetry in the *Poetics* (9.2–3), where he argues that poetry is more scientific and serious than history because the former presents what may occur in the future, while the latter merely records what has already been. But, our historian was not content to simply report "what Alcibiades did and what he suffered." He was specifically committed to discovering the recurring patterns of history with an eye toward their prognostic value.

At this point, it is necessary to define precisely what is meant by terms such as "principles," "patterns," and "universals" as applied by Thucydides. Experts have long noted that the ancient Greek view of history tended to be cyclical, as opposed to the modern conception, which is rectilinear and therefore at least implicitly suggestive of some form of progress.[16] But the notion of "recurring cycles" as applied to the Greeks can be highly misleading if it is taken to indicate some scheme of lockstep determinism. The Greeks certainly preferred to take a broad view of life, and they may have also been disinclined to allow "details" to discredit some neatly conceived theory, but this does not mean they employed facile formulas to deny the complexities of a given subject matter. This is particularly true of Thucydides, who, while entirely committed to revealing the inner logic of the Peloponnesian War, is nevertheless deeply sensitive to the specific conditions that shaped the conflict. As a result, Thucydides never claims to have discovered any "iron laws" of history. He never proffers any ready recipes to make sense of the politics, personalities, or military dynamics of the struggle. Nothing is ultimately fixed or final in the assessments he makes because Thucydides' greatness as a thinker includes a full grasp of, and a deep appreciation for, the contingencies that contour the human drama. More precisely, he understands that the recurring patterns of history are not ordained as part of some inexorable, metaphysical drama, but are instead always subject to alteration by the vagaries of circumstance. What we are therefore entitled to describe in the work of Thucydides is an explanatory method in which a limited lawfulness operates without ulti-

mate guarantee. It is in this modest sense alone that Thucydides hopes to aid us in understanding the past and in acquiring insight about the future.

Human Nature—The Bedrock of History

In the modern era, historians typically frame their explanations for historical events in sociological or economic terms: America's political stability is a result of our nation's enormous middle class, while the collapse of the Soviet Union resulted from a socialist economic system incapable of competing with Western capitalism. While the Greeks were not entirely insensitive to considerations of this sort, such things were clearly not seen as the primary causes of historical phenomena. Instead, poets, dramatists, philosophers, and historians all accepted *anthropeia physis* (human nature) as the basic foundation of history. This essentially psychological perspective included the complete roster of human pathologies — fear, jealousy, cruelty, delusion, and stupidity. For the Greeks, these were the true engines of historical process, constituting a core etiology that would forever shape the course of human events. This explains why Thucydides' brilliant diagnosis of the war's causes is unattended by any preventive formula. In the final analysis, Athenian ambitions, and the terrible destruction they engender for Athens and the rest of Greece, are essentially resistant to permanent remedy. Their excesses are simply reflective of what all men would do under similar circumstances. Again, the reason is not foreign; it doesn't lie in the stars, but rather in the very nature of man himself. Human nature, then, is the immutable foundation of history, and by focusing on the root cause, Thucydides can legitimately claim to have written a work of abiding significance.

Although the *anthropeia physis* is a thematic constant that resonates throughout the entire *History*, Thucydides offers one particular compelling summary of this motif in a speech presented by an Athenian delegation appearing in Sparta immediately prior to the war's outbreak. Their remarks, which include a series of adroit observations concerning the impulses that propel human affairs, have collectively come to be called the "Athenian thesis" (see especially 1.75–77). The presentation begins by tracing the manner in which Athens has acquired her empire, starting with the conspicuous heroism she displayed during the Persian Wars. At the war's end the Greeks were anxious for leadership against the possibility of future barbarian incursions, but Sparta shrank from her responsibilities and the allies turned instead to Athens. The Delian League was established under these conditions, but the Athenians soon found themselves "compelled" by circumstances to convert the alliance into an empire, to move from *hegemonia* to *arche*. One of the terms used by Thucy-

dides to convey the notion of compulsion is *nikethentes*, which literally suggests being "overwhelmed" (i.e., helpless to do otherwise). In particular, the Athenians cite three factors that "drove" them to become a tyrant city—fear, honor, and self-interest (1.75.3 and 1.76.2).[17] There is nothing particularly remarkable about any of this, according to the Athenians. They have simply complied with the dictates of human nature and have done what anyone else, under similar circumstances, would have done because any state enjoying power will naturally press its advantage to the limit.

And what of the matter of justice? How do considerations of right and fairness figure in the Athenian thesis? Pleas of justice are always disregarded by those possessing might they say. No one in a position to secure his aims by strength will ever be deterred from doing so by moral scruple. In this respect, Thucydides directly anticipates the views put forth later by Thrasymachus and Callicles in the Platonic dialogues. In addition, the Athenians present what they see as an eternal logic that will forever govern relations between the weak and strong: the former, irrespective of right, must submit to the latter. In addressing this point, Thucydides raises an issue that is not only key to his work but was also apparently an object of ongoing debate and analysis among the Greeks from earliest times. In Hesiod, for example, we are told of an exchange between a hawk and a nightingale that reads like a poetic equivalent of the Melian dialogue. The nightingale, having been seized by the hawk, cries out pitifully. The hawk responds:

> Miserable thing, why do you cry out? One far stronger than you now holds you fast, and you must go wherever I take you, songstress as you are. And if I please I will make my meal of you, or let you go. He is a fool who tries to withstand the stronger, for he does not get the mastery and suffers pain besides his shame [*Works and Days* 205–10].

A similar parable is contained in Aristotle's *Politics*, where a fable ascribed to the Cynic Anthisthenes is mentioned in which lions and hares discourse on the merits of equality. The lions debunk claims of equity on the part of weaker species by asking, "Where are your claws and teeth?" (3.8.2).[18] The message is clear, and it is one that appears again and again in the *History*: the issue of justice and right can only arise when the power to compel is held equally by both sides. In the real world, one either controls or serves, dominates or is dominated, because human nature will always enfranchise advantage at the expense of justice.[19]

What we discover, therefore, is that "all roads lead back to the Athenian thesis" (Orwin 86). During the Mytilenian debate, for instance, Diodotus notes that the rebellious islanders cannot be faulted for their actions because all men are prone to transgression when they see opportunity for advantage,

and no system of penalties is powerful enough to deter such impulses (3.45–46). Again, at a conference at Gela, the Syracusan patriot Hermocrates is prepared to excuse Athens' imperial ambitions because these aspirations are simply "an instinct of man's nature" (4.61.5). And finally, there is the *locus classicus* of the Athenian thesis, the Melian debate, where we are told that both gods and men always, by a necessity of nature, rule when they have the power to do so, with the result that "the powerful exact what they can, while the weak yield what they must" (5.89.1).

These, then, are the chief characteristics of the Athenian thesis, a unifying thread that lends texture and substance to the entire *History*, but there is something more. In addition to man's rapacious urge to maximize his own advantage and the corresponding tendency to ignore the dictates of justice, piety, and moderation, men are also, according to Thucydides, highly susceptible to the seductions of *elpis* (hope). The modern reader soon realizes that the *History* employs this term in a fashion significantly different from most contemporary usages. Where we tend to see "hope" as a sustainer of the human spirit in the face of adversity, Thucydides sees *elpis* as a whore. She is the great deceiver, the rotter of minds and the thief of good sense and rational calculation who fraudulently converts gray reality into rose-colored "truth." As a conjurer of illusive wish, she blinds us, making the impetuous and reckless seem reasonable and safe, with the result that men seek that which can only result in disaster and ruin.[20] Once one is inspired by this treacherous beguiler, not even the threat of death is capable of restoring an accurate grasp of reality (3.45 and 5.103).[21]

The significance of *elpis* in human affairs is established definitively by Thucydides in his treatment of Athenian designs toward Sicily. Earlier, during the negotiations between Sparta and Athens involving those captured at Sphacteria, the Spartans had warned the triumphant Athenians not to allow their unexpected good fortune to fuel their hopes for the future (4.17.4–5). This advice was ignored and instead of enjoying their largess, the Athenians began to calculate future blessings recklessly. Giddy with their position of relative advantage, the Athenians manifested a mad dream of western expansion that included not only Sicily but perhaps even Italy and Carthage (see 6.15.2 and 6.90.2–3; also Aristophanes' *Knights* 174 and 1303)—and all this before having properly subdued the still formidable roster of foes in Greece.

False hope nourished by momentary advantage also stands at the center of the Sicilian debate immediately preceding the expedition. Here, Nicias is cast as the voice of reason. He warns the Athenians not to reach out for another empire before the one they have has been properly secured.[22] He also notes that the Spartans, despite their recent humiliation, are far from finished and

that Athens must resist its "morbid craving for what is out of reach" (6.13.1). For his part, Alcibiades sees the expedition as a priceless opportunity for gain and glory, and warns that a state like Athens must forever remain active and enterprising; for a tyrant city, peace is inimical to survival—Athens must expand or perish (6.18.6–7).[23] The assembly finds this logic irresistibly intoxicating, and despite a last-ditch effort by Nicias to temper Athenian ambition by demanding an armament of unprecedented magnitude, the people endorse the folly proposed by Alcibiades. Indeed, the mental state at Athens is so delusional at this point that Nicias' attempt to dissuade the Athenians actually titillates them further; the more immense the undertaking, the more urgently Athens desires it (6.24.3).[24] I have argued above that, according to Thucydides, Sicily and Melos are not linked by any divinely inspired compensatory scheme, but this should not suggest there is no relation whatsoever. Both Athenians and Melians were lured to the rocks by the siren song of hope: one group risked everything on the misguided view that the gods and allies rescue those with just cause, while the others had their wits stolen by the specter of grand enterprise compounded by immoderate desires.

Thucydides does not present human nature as a decorative detail. It is offered instead as the stubborn and irreducible substructure of history. In a sense, he sees the tendencies contained in the Athenian thesis as forces of nature in comparison to which the restraints of reason and justice are paltry and impotent. This is because men rarely chart the courses of their lives by appealing to neutral and dispassionate logic. Desire, typically violent and self-serving, is what too often determines human options. Thucydides does accept, however, the possibility of exceptions to this rule. The luster with which Pericles shines forth from the pages of *History* makes this clear. Nevertheless, Pericles and his like are extraordinary exceptions because rational and moderate voices rarely register with men during times of war.

These observations, as brilliantly developed and presented as they are, do not constitute the limit of Thucydides' insights regarding human nature. He is also thoroughly conversant with what these points imply for the sociopolitical domain. In particular, Thucydides is acutely aware of the fundamental fragility of society, of the ease with which the bonds uniting human beings in civilized existence can be tattered and frayed. The catalyst for this sort of disintegration is, above all else, war, the "rough schoolmaster" that empowers cruelty and depravity to the point that man becomes wolf to man. The Corcyrean *stasis* is perhaps Thucydides' most famous illustration of the resulting horrors, a situation in which even human communication is perverted by violence and treachery (3.82).[25] Add to this the savage episodes of Plataea, Thyrea, Scione, Melos, and, most of all, the mindless blood lust of Mycalessus,[26] and

Thucydides' point is only too clear: the human condition includes moments of moral amnesia in which madness can flow like a river, sweeping before it all that is seemly, honorable, and right.

Summary

Early in the *History*, Thucydides informs his reader that the events that have taken place will, in all likelihood, occur again in the same or similar fashion (1.22.4). This observation could only be made by a historian who believed he was something more than a mere compiler of facts, a man confident he had pierced the veil of history and consequently possessed genuine insight regarding the march of human events. This does not mean that Thucydides claimed to have discovered Hegel's "cunning of history" or that he subscribed to some Stoic-like scheme of ordained recurrence. The prediction stems instead from the belief that all history is contingent upon human nature and that this foundation is essential and everlasting. Of course, specific circumstances will alter with time; Thucydides would have been the first to acknowledge that the discontinuities between classical antiquity and the modern world are massive and preclude the possibility of uncomplicated analogizing. But the broad outlines of history, the basic rhythm and cadence, remain timeless, according to Thucydides, because they are eternally linked to the persistent and irremediable urgings of the human spirit.

Thucydides was also convinced that these unrelenting propensities typically incline humanity toward the pathological. In particular, he believed the majority of men, by their very nature, seek to maximize power and advantage, and in so doing routinely bring themselves to grief. For Thucydides, this failing is the crux of the human condition, or better, the human dilemma, because the quest for power entails a kind of Faustian bargain in which the hunter becomes the quarry.[27] The goal of human agency, the desire to realize one's potential in life, makes power an indispensable ingredient in a rich and fulfilled existence. Having acquired power, however, most will misapply it, defiling in the process not only the rule of law but also the most rudimentary norms of human decency. There are occasional exceptions — the majestic restraint of Pericles is Thucydides' prime illustration of how power should be managed. The difficulty is that Cleon, not Pericles, is the generic type, the "all too human" representative of the race. Among such men as these, constructive potentials of power are disastrously subverted and in the end become a source of injustice and misery for all concerned.

In presenting these and all other points, Thucydides maintains a sobriety bordering on resignation. Nowhere are we offered any techniques to make

gentle the human heart, nor are we ever encouraged to beg the will of heaven for relief in these matters. Indeed, for contemporary readers, fond as we are of our notions of "progress," the pages of Thucydides appear more than a bit gloomy. Here we need to remember that our conception of human advancement is very different from that of the ancient Greeks. Modernity tends to measure progress in terms of technological breakthroughs and material prosperity. But the Hellenes would have scoffed at any idea of progress that failed to address the brutalities that continue to plague humankind. Were he here today, Thucydides would surely remind us that man is at best a semi-domesticated creature, that civilization is skin deep, and that men are by nature strongly disinclined to convert swords into plowshares. Moreover, he would undoubtedly point to the fact that while we may have split the atom and are now capable of littering the modern landscape with all manner of gadgets and contraptions, we are still not one bit closer to having lions lie down with lambs. For Thucydides, human nature is a recalcitrant malady that will ceaselessly register its appalling edicts — a point to which the unprecedented horrors of the 20th century bear grim testimony. Viewed from these perspectives, Thucydides' message is clear: the *History of the Peloponnesian War* is not an isolated record of human conflict, not some period piece unique to the 5th century B.C. It is instead, as Thucydides himself argued, "a possession for all time."

The Thucydidean Legacy

Among a narrow circle of specialized scholars, the ancient texts remain salient and applicable commentaries on the human condition. For the vast majority, however, the works of antiquity are of purely antiquitarian interest. They offer images of a quaint past incapable of speaking to the issues and challenges of modern life. Thus, it is argued that the ancient literature merits its conveyance to the netherworld of our libraries and databases, where only the necromantic interests of a few philologists will occasionally disrupt a well-deserved repose. To all this, Thucydides has remained a remarkable exception. For more than 2,000 years, his analysis of the Peloponnesian War has enjoyed an extraordinary didactic authority in a wide variety of fields. His depictions of democracy have, for example, often been cited to inspire those called upon to defend the virtues of a democratic society. During World War I, placards bearing references to the *History* were attached to London buses to remind the British people what they were fighting for. More recently, the preamble to the proposed Constitution of the European Union (2003) specifically quotes Thucydides' (2.37) definition of "democracy." In addition, a good many public

officials have called upon the ancient historian to inform and inspire their analysis of world politics. George Marshall, for example, was convinced that Thucydides was an invaluable explanatory device in America's efforts to make sense of Cold War dynamics; a generation later, Secretary of State Colin Powell found it appropriate to remind U.S. State Department personnel of the Thucydidean maxim that restraint is the most impressive display of a nation's might. Not surprisingly, the *History* has also been a curricular staple at America's military academies for years. Thus, it seems, that despite our best efforts to consign Thucydides to the dustbin of history, he simply refuses to stay put.

Beyond these and many other intermittent references to Thucydides that might be cited, there are two paramount aspects of his legacy that have had a profound effect upon Western culture. The first involves the establishment of a new and unprecedented historical consciousness. On both substantive and methodological grounds, Thucydides' *History* constitutes a new dawn that has had an incalculable influence on all subsequent historical works. Unlike his predecessors, Hellene and non–Hellene alike, Thucydides was not dedicated to offering some religious apologia or to promoting the glorious achievements of some king or emperor. Nor was it his purpose to compose a jingoistic commemorative epic for his polis at the expense of other Greek city-states. What we find instead in the pages of this seminal work is the record of a terrible conflict presented in a manner fundamentally devoid of hidden agendas and ulterior motives. In other words, the *History* is a work in which the voice of authorial politics has been virtually silenced in favor of achieving an exact understanding of past events. The only "agenda" with which Thucydides is concerned, the only sense in which he can be deemed a partisan, lies in his commitment to truth. This explains why there is no room in his narrative for hearsay, gossip and uncertified anecdotes. It also accounts for an investigative methodology that, for the first time in history, brings a critical, rational technique to historical inquiry that is capable of distinguishing fact from fiction. The significance of Thucydides' unwillingness to accept surface appraisals, along with his concomitant devotion to revealing the core realities beneath historical data, are revolutionary advancements that directly parallel the spirit and methods of modern historiography. Indeed, as H.E. Barnes notes, "Leopold von Ranke, at the opening of the nineteenth century, did not expound more earnestly than Thucydides had at the close of the fifth century B.C. the basic tenet of scientific history, namely, the accuracy of data must be the foundation of true historical writing."[28]

Armed with this new analytical perspective, Thucydides went on to dramatically elevate the standards of historical assessment. For him, the mere amassing of factual detail, while an indispensable aspect of historical inves-

tigation, is not enough. The true historian must attempt to transcend the welter of details in favor of deeper, recurring patterns. Here, Thucydides replicates in the realm of history one of the perennial aspirations of all Greek intellectual — identification of the "one in the many." This attempt to reveal the abiding order and meaning beneath the turmoil of ephemeral phenomena was a hallmark of Hellenic thought from earliest times. It reflects a conviction in the existence of unifying causes capable of lending intelligible explanation to our world. Thucydides fully embraced this logic and eventually arrived at what he understood to be the one constant and true cause of historical events — human nature. This was the key, in his view, to dispelling the mystery of historical process. Human nature, properly adduced by attentive examination, is the motive force that drives history. Thus, when Thucydides affirms that it is a necessary law that men rule whenever they can (5.105) or that fear is often the true explanation for violent conflict (1.23) or that the powerful typically take what they like, while the weak yield what they must (5.89), he believes he offers something more than a catalog of 5th-century eccentricities unique to the Greek world. These are universal precepts with perennial implications. They are nothing short of governing principles that defy temporal and cultural limitation, and it is specifically these enduring forces that contribute to the second part of Thucydides' legacy: the theory of international politics known as "realism."

Thucydides is generally acknowledged to be the father of international relations (IR).[29] Moreover, his *History*, notwithstanding the passage of twenty-four hundred years, continues to be described as perhaps the best single work ever written on the subject.[30] The reason for these claims relates to the compelling manner in which Thucydides unveils the scheme of opposing interests and violent oppositions governing interstate relations — all ultimately traceable to the invariable mandates of human nature. Despite the inexorable sociopolitical discontinuities between ancient and modern times, the Thucydidean lens has remained a seminal mechanism among political scientists for the obvious reason that men continue to abuse power, dedicate themselves to personal advantage, and predictably advance prospects for gain at the expense of moral imperative. In short, the behavioral realities of the political domain have guaranteed Thucydides' ongoing relevance. They have also ensured the rise of an impressive roster of scholars who, to varying degrees, remain loyal to the fundamental premises of the ancient Athenian. Among these are H.J. Morgenthau,[31] Robert Giplin, Kenneth Waltz, Joseph Nye, and John Mearsheimer. This unanimity suggests that Thucydides' claim that he did not simply write an essay for the moment but rather *klema es aei* (a possession for all time) is no idle boast but a legitimate assessment of a remarkable work.

Appendix

Causation

In reading Thucydides it is difficult not to arrive at the conclusion that the Greeks were a people bent on self-destruction. Indeed, one could argue that no other people in history has been more ready to measure arms against themselves than the ancient Greeks. In this light, the Peloponnesian War is simply the most spectacular example of a fierce internecine instinct that plagued Hellas throughout most of its history. Exactly why a people united by language, cultural tradition, and historical experience would engage so consistently in fratricidal strife is an intriguing question, but it is not one that specifically concerns Thucydides, who instead focuses the bulk of his effort upon diagnosing the precise origins of the great war.

As we might expect from a man of his genius, Thucydides looks beyond the obvious and prosaic range of possible explanations. This war is not, for example, the product of inter-tribal animosity (i.e. Ionian Greek versus Dorian Greek). Nor is the conflict attributable to ideological antagonisms such as those that might occur between democratic and oligarchic regimes. Not even an economic interpretation can furnish the genuine cause of this conflict, according to Thucydides, for whom the *alethestate prophasis* (the true cause) is related to a long and complex series of events that in turn have their origins in the nature of man himself.

Almost immediately after the conclusion of the Persian wars, relations between Athens and Sparta began to deteriorate. Minus the threat of the Great King's army, the cooperative impulse waned rapidly among the Greeks, who soon gave vent to their traditional jealousies and suspicions. In no small measure, this reversion was advanced by Athens' penchant for provocative enterprise — the very sort of restless dynamism Corinth would later decry in her demands for full-scale military action against the Athenians (1.70). On the domestic scene, for example, Athens aggressively sought to expand her influence in central Greece, to gain control of the strategically significant Megarid, and to establish a series of treaty relations that Sparta and her allies could only see as inimical to their interests. In addition, as if this were not enough, Athenian audacity included a number of daring foreign campaigns in places as far afield as Cyprus and Egypt. In the end, most of this adventurism failed to yield Athens any lasting fruit. What it did succeed in producing, however, was an atmosphere thick with tensions and ill will in which many Greek states, including Corinth, Thebes, Megara, and Aegina as well as Sparta, became convinced that Athens was a menace whose ambitions knew no limit.

The mounting frictions of this pre-war period were contained temporarily by the "Thirty Year Peace," a feebly palliative measure that did nothing more than delay the impending cataclysm. Tensions remained high throughout the truce but were eventually brought to a boil by three specific incidents: the Corcyrean affair, the Megarian Decree, and the Athenian ultimatum and subsequent siege of Potidaea. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Thucydides did not believe that these situations were the ultimate basis for the war, and he is quick to make a distinction between these *aitai*, or immediate factors, and the *prophasis*—that is, the genuine, deep-seated cause. In other words, there were inciting or contributory events, and then there was an authentic determinant that had, by implication, escaped the understanding of popular opinion. Athenian support for Corcyra,[32] which resulted in direct conflict between Athens and Corinth, was certainly a source of the latter's implacable hatred of Athens, but this in itself did not "cause" the war. Nor did the Megarian Decree, which apparently barred Megara from the Athenian market and all of the ports of the empire.[33] Even the Athenian response to Corinthian and Spartan machinations at Potidaea cannot be taken, according to Thucydides, as anything more than a symptom of the foundational cause that subsequently plunged the Greek world into blood.

The true *causus belli*, according to Thucydides, was the disruption of Greece's strategic balance of power. The Spartans and their allies were increasingly dismayed by the relentless attempts of Athens to expand her domain and influence; it did indeed appear that the Athenians were "born neither to have peace themselves nor to let other men have it." In essence, then, it was not the naval engagement at Sybota or the investment of Potidaea that propelled the Greeks along their disastrous path. In Thucydides' opinion, it was something far more elemental, far more human, that made this conflict inevitable—fear (1.23.6 and 1.88). Sparta, intimidated by the scope of Athenian ambition, had concluded that her enemy's expansive lusts could be curbed only by force of arms and that action must be taken before Athens grew any stronger. True to his outlook and method, Thucydides refuses to identify the cause of war with what he sees as mere contingencies. Instead, he focuses upon that perennial substratum from which all historical explanation is ultimately derived—human nature, the chief impulses of which are fear, honor, and self-interest (1.76.2).

A Tale of Two Cities

Although the Peloponnesian War was a pan–Hellenic struggle, there were two "great powers" in particular that dominated the political, military, and

diplomatic affairs of the period: Athens and Sparta. Despite their fundamental "Greekness," these two people could not have been more different in terms of customs, outlook, and ethos, and these divergencies explain many of the peculiar rhythms of the conflict. For Thucydides, the vast gap separating the Athenian and Spartan ways of life was reducible to a single image, that between rest and motion. The natural inclination of the Spartans, notwithstanding their well-earned reputations as fighters, was to shrink from the adventurism to which the Athenians were prone. By comparison, they seemed slow, dilatory, and cautious almost to the point of paralysis. This predilection for unruffled inactivity caused considerable frustration among Sparta's allies, particularly the Corinthians, who draw some highly invidious comparisons between their Peloponnesian ally and Athens (1.70)—at one point chiding the Spartans as "old fashioned" (1.70.2). In all fairness to Sparta, however, one must note that a good deal of this hesitancy was related to the omnipresent threat of Helot insurgency and the equally intractable animosities of Argos. Any major, long-term military commitment on Sparta's part had to be carefully weighed against the prospect of unleashing hostile elements at home.

By comparison, the Athenians were vital, impetuous, and opportunistic (1.70, 7.21, and 8.96).[34] Thucydides accents these points when he uses the term *polypragmosyne* to describe the Athenian character, meaning "mettlesomeness" or "busybodiness" (6.87.3). To be Athenian meant being inclined to intrude and disrupt; by their very nature, Athenians were irrepressible assailants of the status quo.[35] Unfortunately for Sparta, her phlegmatic manner proved to be an apt foil for Athenian audacity, and Thucydides clearly believes that in this confrontation of Spartan torpidity with Athenian energy lies the explanation for much of the latter's success in the war (8.96.5). Only when Athens confronts another large, vigorous democracy (Syracuse) does she encounter a force capable of thwarting her dynamism.

The Double Plague

There are two plagues described by Thucydides. The first (and more readily acknowledged) pestilence despoiled the flesh of men, while the second devastated the spirit. As the war began, the Athenians implemented Pericles' attritional strategy; the customary clash of hoplite formations would be waived. Rather than take the field against the Peloponnesians, the Athenians elected to remain safe behind their walls,[36] linked to the outside world by the unimpeded activities of her fleet. As a defensive "island" with vast financial resources,[37] Athens sought to protract the war and slowly erode the military resolve of her enemies. Pericles, ever loyal to his moderate

nature, did not seek a smashing victory against Sparta — stalemate would be triumph enough.

In principle, this approach should have produced the results anticipated by Pericles — an opponent frustrated, exhausted, and drained of resources. The actual results were quite different, however, particularly for Athens. Not even Pericles, whose prescience is specifically noted by Thucydides (2.65.5), could foresee the dire health consequences inherent in massing the majority of Athenians behind the city's walls. Scholars have long debated the exact nature of the pestilence; everything from measles to ergotism has been proposed (see Gomme, Andrews, and Dover 2:105–2). In all probability, however, it was typhus that ravaged Athens, the transmission of which was no doubt facilitated by the overcrowding.

The clinical precision with which the epidemic's pathology is described (2.49) remains one of the most vivid illustrations of Thucydides' keen power of observation, as well as his fierce commitment to detailed accuracy. The same can be said for his analysis of the social consequences wrought by the plague. Not only did the disease kill a large portion of the city's population (perhaps one third), it also engendered a lawlessness among the Athenians, a kind of "state of nature" in which the restraints of custom and propriety were abandoned (2.52–2.53). The uncertainties of tomorrow led men to live for today; the pleasures of the moment were indulged recklessly and without limit. Fear of the law, or even fear of the gods, could not dispose men to civilized conduct. The lesson proffered here by Thucydides is clear, and it is a point he makes often: there is an alarming degenerative tendency in the human spirit — beneath the surface of our noble institutions and fine words, there lurk anarchical elements.

The other plague analyzed by Thucydides is not microbial in nature; it doesn't manifest itself with ulcerations or raging fevers. Rather, this disease discloses its fatal specter by way of social divisions and murderous hatreds. In short, the second plague is *stasis* (i.e., factional strife within the polis). The animosities engendered by this civic malady dissolve the unitive sinews of society, including the ties (family, friends, and community) that make civilized existence possible (3.82).[38]

During the early phases of war, Athens had shown itself largely immune to the effects of this factional plague. In great measure, her resistance stemmed from the quality of leadership the city enjoyed under Pericles, who, by dint of political genius and personal conduct, was able to keep the Athenians focused on the common good. After his death, however, the quality of leadership declined conspicuously (see below); public service was increasingly displaced by private ambition, and in Thucydides' opinion, it was this

self-centeredness that produced the civil discord that cost Athens the war (2.56.6–11).

Leadership

There are two individuals in particular upon whom Thucydides heaps unstinting praise in the *History*—Themistocles and Pericles.[39] Although the former died nearly thirty years before the outbreak of the war, his vision of Athenian greatness continued to inspire and animate Athenian policy throughout this period and beyond.[40] For Thucydides, Themistocles possessed an Odyssean cunning—an uncanny ability to lift the veil from future events and devise plans that would advance Athenian interests. It was specifically this prognostic capacity that led Themistocles to insist upon the fortification of the Piraeus and ultimately to formulate the thalassocratic strategy that resulted in the Athenian empire (1.93.4).

If, then, Themistocles can be seen as the architect of Athenian imperialism (a view clearly held by Thucydides), it was Pericles who applied the blueprint. No other man in Athenian history so thoroughly dominated the civic affairs of the city—a particularly remarkable achievement given the political volatility to which Athens was prone. For more than thirty years (461–429 B.C.), Pericles was the fundamental force behind every major policy decision of the Athenians. His ascendancy in these matters was so complete that Thucydides refers to him as *protos aner*, the "first man," suggesting by this phrase that Athens was actually a democracy in name only (2.65.9). What the state had in fact become, as a result of the extraordinary leadership of this individual, was a kind of annually reestablished kingship.[41] Thucydides is deeply impressed by this achievement and, as a result, he admiringly presents the special qualities that enabled Pericles to attain his unique status. Some of these talents are revealed in a speech in which Pericles defends himself against a disgruntled citizenry intent upon holding him accountable for its war-related miseries. Here we are told of four attributes for effective leadership: 1) an ability to determine a correct course of actions, 2) a capacity to articulate these measures effectively to the people, 3) an abiding loyalty to the state, and 4) incorruptibility (2.60.5–6). Not only did Pericles possess these virtues "more than other men," he also projected a consistent air of decency and high-mindedness, so much so that he received the nickname "Olympian" among the Athenians. Furthermore, he was the only political figure in Athens with the courage and the ability to remonstrate the people when necessary. Unlike other leaders (particularly his immediate successors, who routinely pandered to the demos), Pericles alone successfully instructed

and restrained the people; where the others flattered, he alone dared to speak the truth (2.65.8).[42]

Beyond the considerable gifts that he put at the disposal of Athens, there was one thing above all else that Pericles offered his people — a vision of "great politics." In a spirit reminiscent of Homer, Pericles challenged the Athenians to eschew the insipid and transitory objectives prized by others. Instead, he counseled them to set their sights on a fuller region where inspired achievements live on forever. Pericles acknowledged that there were some serious risks associated with his ideal but he reminded Athens that the greatest honors accrue only to those willing to run the greatest risks (1.144.3). By encouraging the Athenians to seek the glow of imperishable glory, Pericles not only registers for Thucydides the measure of his own greatness but simultaneously illustrates for us the difference between a statesman and a mere politician.

If Pericles was indeed the "Olympian," then the majority of his successors are perhaps best described as "chthonic." In particular, men like Cleophon, Hyperbolus, and Cleon[43] not only abandon the Periclean paradigm, they positively disfigure it on behalf of selfish advancement and personal gain. In comparison to the likes of Themistocles, Cimon, and Pericles, these men are little more than civic opportunists whose methods and purposes indicate a near total disregard for the commonweal. Predictably, these developments had an immediate impact upon the tenor of Athenian politics. The moderate strategies and lofty idealism of Pericles were rapidly displaced by depraved appeals to violence and cruelty; justice became the will of the stronger. What Thucydides effectively presents here in the *History* is the political equivalent of Gresham's Law: the precious currency minted by Pericles is debased and driven out by mountebanks and demagogues.

All of this leads to one rather obvious bit of speculation: What would have happened had Pericles lived beyond the first two and a half years of the war? We can only guess, of course, but it is difficult to imagine Pericles endorsing the horrid mistreatment of the Melians or the intemperate folly of the Sicilian campaign. In addition, knowing what we do of his character and policies, it is inconceivable that Pericles would have spurned the Spartan peace offer made during the winter of 425–424 B.C.

Notes

1. C. Castoriadis observes, "It is a striking fact that historiography properly speaking has existed only during two periods of human history: in Ancient Greece and in modern Europe — that is, in the cases of the two societies where questioning of the existing institutions has occurred" (see *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1991], 114).

2. The Egyptians were remarkably diligent analysts, but they were not historians.

In fact, true history does not appear among the Egyptians before the priest Manetho in the 3rd century B.C. Significantly, his work was written in Greek.

3. As Collingwood observes, many of those who preceded the Greeks were actually writing religion, not history (see *The Idea of History* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1956], 12).

4. For all his skepticism, Hecataeus still did not escape the ridicule of Heraclitus, who observed in referring to the historian that much learning does not guarantee intelligence (Diels, fr. 40).

5. It may be that Plutarch's assaults were motivated by Boeotian pride. Herodotus notes that with few exceptions the Boeotians had "Medized" during the Persian Wars (i.e., they had supported Persia against the Greek cause). Plutarch may be out to discredit Herodotus, making him the "father of lies," not history, in an effort to exculpate his people (see "The Malice of Herodotus" in *Moralia*, especially 847b–c).

6. While acknowledging him as the greatest historian, Dionysius of Halicarnassus nevertheless criticizes Thucydides for the obscurities created by his stylistic novelties (see *Critical Essays*, sections 13, 24, 35, 46, and 52).

7. No doubt the intellectual pluralism of 5th-century Athens stimulated many exchanges across "disciplinary" lines. Scholars have long noted, for instance, the affinities between certain aspects of the *History* and Greek drama. There is also evidence to suggest that Thucydides was influenced by several treatises of the Hippocratic Corpus, such as *Prognostics*, *Epidemics*, and *Acute Diseases*.

8. The more than forty speeches presented in the *History* are also part of this instructional scheme. Their function is to indicate points of preeminent importance and to provide the reader with an opportunity for reflective pause.

9. The significance of Amphipolis for Athens was both strategic and material. As long as it remained in Athenian hands, it barred further Lacedaemonian expansion in the region. In addition, Amphipolis was a key source of mineral wealth for Athens as well as of the timber needed for ship building (see *History* 4.108.1).

10. It should be noted that Thucydides does consider the role fortune (*tyche*) plays in human affairs, but he never associates fortune with the will of the gods. For him, chance/luck is a brute force that randomly imposes itself upon the affairs of men; *tyche* never equals nemesis.

11. This point is well summarized by Dionysius of Halicanassus, who states, "History is the High Priestess of Truth in our view, and Thucydides concerned himself above all with recording the truth, neither adding to nor subtracting from the facts unjustifiably" (8). See also Lucian, *How to Write History*, 41. On the idea of truth as the standard of real history, see Cicero, *De Oratore* 2.15, and Polybius, *The Histories* 12.12, 12.27, and 38.4.

12. Thucydides questions the worth of Homer (1.10.3), corrects the *History* of Herodotus (1.20 and 1.21), and chastises the work of Hellanicus (1.97.2).

13. The great example of this credulity involves the so-called tyrannicides, Hermodius and Aristogeiton, who, according to Athenian lore, struck a blow for democracy by killing the tyrant Hipparchus. As it turns out, not only did their motives have more to do with erotic jealousy than political principle, but Hipparchus was not even a tyrant at the time of his death (1.20.2).

14. Hegel's observation that history teaches one lesson — that men do not learn lessons from history — is consistent with modern assessment. But Thucydides seems more inclined to argue that "history is philosophy teaching by example," a view attributed to Dionysius of Halicarnassus by Bolingbroke.

15. This explains, for instance, why Thucydides tends to de-emphasize biographical detail in his *History*. Unlike Herodotus, he displays a considerable impatience with the local, the personal, and isolated episodes.

16. The concept of historical progress is a uniquely modern idea that did not emerge

until the Enlightenment era and is specifically associated with such thinkers as Locke, Montesquieu, Condorcet, Diderot, and Voltaire.

17. The statement bears a striking resemblance to several key passages in Hobbes' *Leviathan*. In particular, see 1.13, where Hobbes identifies competition, diffidence, and glory as the three factors that produce conflict between men.

18. Hesiod notes that "justice" is a special gift conferred upon humanity by Zeus and designed to prevent men from devouring one another like wild animals (*Work and Days* 275–80). The realpolitik of Thucydides' *History* indicates how impotent this gift is in reality.

19. Even prior to its formal annunciation in the speech at Sparta, there are imitations of the Athenian thesis as early as the "Archeology" (i.e., the introductory sections of the *History* [see 1.8.3]).

20. Thucydides' views of *elpis* cast the story of Pandora's box in a new light. Humanity should be comforted not because hope remains available, but rather because hope, the heaviest ill the gods could array against mankind, did not escape with the other evils. Greek tragedy presents hope in both a positive (*Prometheus Bound* 250–53) and a Thucydidean fashion (*Antigone* 668–70).

21. Here Thucydides and Hobbes seem to part company. The latter saw the fear of death as the most powerful of human passions, but Thucydides presents *elpis* as even more compelling than *phobos*.

22. On this point, Nicias echoes the sage advice of Pericles (2.65.7).

23. Here Alcibiades directly anticipates the view of Machiavelli (see *Prince*, chapter 3; *Discourses* 1.1; cf. Aristotle, *Politics* 7.13.15).

24. Thucydides stresses this point through his choice of words. When describing Athenian eagerness, instead of using *pothos* (meaning "longing" or "yearning"), he uses *eros* to emphasize the passionate, if not irrational, quality of the Athenians at this moment.

25. This is a particularly significant observation because the Greeks saw language as a major source of demarcation between man and beast; debasement of language is a debasement of humanity itself (see Isocrates, *Panegyricus* 48, and *Nicocles* 5; see also Aristotle, *Politics* 1.1.10).

26. In describing this massacre by Thracian mercenaries, Thucydides departs momentarily from his role as icy analyst and expresses indignation over the gratuitous slaughter (7.29; see also Gomme, Andrews, and Dover, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides,* 4.410).

27. Thucydides believes that all men by nature seek to possess power, but in the end it is often the case that power comes to possess them. This seems to be the implication of Pericles' remarks at 2.63.2.

28. See *A History of Historical Writing* (New York: Dover, 1963), 30.

29. See R.N. Lebow, "Texts, Paradigms, and Political Change," in *Realism Reconsidered*, ed. M.C. Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

30. L.T. Halle, *Civilization and Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955), appendix 261.

31. The classic delineation of the Realist School is found in Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1985), 4–17. Among other things, Realists assert that politics is governed by general laws that have their basis in human nature and that the deeds of nations are driven by interests defined in terms of power. Some of those premises have been challenged by Neo-Realists such as Kenneth Waltz, who argue that political phenomena are the result of anarchic relationships between states (i.e., the absence of hegemonic order). See K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1979).

32. Athens could not allow the second-largest fleet in Greece (Corcyra's) to fall into the hands of her Corinthian opponents. Thus, she supported Corcyra in the form of an *epimachia* (defensive alliance) against her metropolis, Corinth.

33. Thucydides does not view the Megarian Decree as terribly significant but common opinion apparently held the interdict to be the chief cause of war. This impression may stem from the comedic stage, specifically the work of Aristophanes (see *Acharnians* 525–35 and *Peace* 609–10).

34. Not all Athenians can be so described. There is an interesting role-reversal in the case of two key figures in the *History*; the Athenian general Nicias displays a timidity characteristic of the Spartans, while the Spartan general, Brasidas, distinguishes himself in a brash Athenian fashion.

35. As Clifford Orwin puts it, "Owls hoot, olives ripen, Athenians harry their neighbors" (44).

36. This strategy was not only a major departure from traditional Greek military tactics, it was also inconsistent with the nature of Athens itself— the city of "motion" pent up behind its own walls.

37. The fiscal advantage enjoyed by Athens is made clear by Thucydides (1.83.2, 1.52.1, and 2.13.3). As a naval power, however, her expenses were far greater than those of the infantry-based Peloponnesian forces. Kagan (236–37) estimates Athenian war expenses to have been at least two thousand talents per year. One thing is absolutely clear from this data: no one, including the Athenians, anticipated a war lasting ten years, much less twenty-seven.

38. The ferocity of these internecine struggles is well summarized by G.M. Calhoun, who notes the frequency with which *prodasia* (treasonous betrayal) figures in Greek politics: "To the Greek, to be ruled by his political opponent was an intolerable humiliation, to be averted at any cost, even if it became necessary to deliver his state into the hands of its foeman. . . . In nearly every instance in which an attack upon a city is described, there is some allusion to parties within the walls who are making preparations to betray the city into the hands of the enemy" (*Athenian Clubs* [New York: Franklin, 1970], 141).

39. Antiphon also receives high marks from Thucydides (8.68.1).

40. Themistocles was the genius behind Athenian naval strategy, which became an ongoing obsession in Athens. Long after her defeat in the Peloponnesian War, she continued to manifest a thalassocratic madness, as we read in the plaintive pages of Isocrates (see *Peace*, especially 101–5).

41. Starting in the year 443 B.C., Pericles was elected to fifteen consecutive generalships.

42. See also Plutarch, *Pericles* 15.2–3; for a very different assessment of Pericles, see Plato's *Gorgias* (518e–519a).

43. Thucydides presents Cleon as an archetype for the political deterioration of Athenian politics. He is one of the few figures in the text who is directly censured by the historian (3.36.6, 4.27.4, and 5.16.1).

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12

Plato (427–347 B.C.)

Fountainhead of Western Philosophy

The name by which we identify this noted Athenian philosopher is in truth a sobriquet meaning "broad," a probable reference to Plato's physical stature. His real name was Aristocles, and he was blessed with some of the most distinguished bloodlines in Athens. Plato's paternal lineage included ties to Codrus, the last Athenian king, and from his mother, he claimed decent from the legendary Athenian lawgiver, Solon. Also on his matrilineal side, Plato was linked to two notorious individuals: Critias and Charmides, members of the infamous group of oligarchs known as the Thirty Tyrants who terrorized Athens between 404 and 403 B.C.

Sources tell us that as a youth Plato considered a career in public service—a traditional choice for men of his social pedigree. Having witnessed firsthand, however, the treachery and violence of Athenian politics, Plato soon relinquished this aspiration. Diogenes Laertius claims Plato also at one point gave consideration to being a playwright, an option he abandoned abruptly upon making the acquaintance of Socrates, who redirected his young follower to the "love of wisdom." Plato's attachment to the Socratic circle lasted for approximately eight years, until the master's trial and execution in 399 B.C. Upon Socrates' death, Plato departed Athens and stayed for some time in Megara with several other members of the Socratic circle. From there, he traveled to Italy and Sicily, where he made the acquaintance of Archytus, a leading Pythagorean thinker, and Dion, a prominent political figure at Syracuse. About this time as well, he may have journeyed to Cyrene and Egypt. In 387 B.C. he returned to Athens and founded the Academy, the first institution of higher learning in Europe. Plato's school was not only dedicated to advanced

philosophical study, it was also committed to producing statesman and lawgivers, as Plutarch explains.[1] After more than 900 years of continuous operation, the Academy was finally closed in A.D. 529 by the emperor Justinian.

In 367 B.C. Plato was encouraged by Dion to return to Syracuse in an effort to convert the young tyrant Dionysius II to philosophy. This endeavor to unite wisdom and power (i.e., to create a living exemplar of philosophical kingship) failed, as did a second attempt made in 360 B.C. The remainder of Plato's life was apparently dedicated to teaching at the Academy and to composing the corpus of dialogues for which he is famous. He reportedly died at Athens while attending a wedding feast at the age of eighty.

Scholars generally agree that the roughly twenty-five dialogues in existence, some of dubious authenticity, reflect all of the works Plato offered for publication. In addition, there are thirteen letters attributed to Plato, of which only the Seventh and Eighth Epistles have received tentative validation. There are also a few spuriously attributed poems in the *Greek Anthology*. In addition, evidence exists for an esoteric teaching of some sort, but if Plato did offer such instruction, it has not survived in any extensive form.[2] Accordingly, attempts to apprehend the meaning and substance of Platonic philosophy must rely upon the dialogues. But serious problems remain in fully deciphering Plato's theories because the dialogues are not only unsystematic but also include a variety of inconsistencies and even contradictions. In an attempt to remedy this situation, scholars have sought to establish an order of composition within the corpus, the assumption being that a chronology of this sort might reveal evolving patterns in Plato's thought. Unfortunately, even computer-assisted analysis has failed to produce an indisputable sequence. Many scholars would agree, however, with the following general arrangement. The first grouping includes the so-called "Socratic" dialogues.[3] These are the earliest works where Socrates plays an *elenctic* role, critically scrutinizing the errant propositions of his interlocutors. The "middle" dialogues present Socrates in a more affirmative light, where he is often heard to actively espouse a variety of political, ethical, and epistemological positions. The "later" dialogues are decidedly more technical and increasingly place far less emphasis on the dramatic persona of Socrates.

While many questions remain, at the very least this taxonomy has assisted scholars in highlighting certain essential aspects of Plato's mature thought. In particular, the Theory of Ideas and Plato's beliefs regarding the human soul merit special consideration. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Plato's entire philosophy is his dualistic portrait of reality. On the one hand, there is the phenomenal realm, the sphere of the senses, which for Plato remains incurably obscure and defiant of anything approximating truth. The funda-

mental opacity of this region arises from its continuous mutability plus its enormous distance from "authentic" existence. These deficiencies make scientific understanding of the empirical world impossible. Indeed, Plato suggests that any effort to make sense of this counterfeit domain would be analogous to reading the shadows on a cave wall (see *Republic*, Bk. 7).[4]

The other sphere in Plato's depiction of reality is radically distinct from the obscurities and imperfections of the sensible world. As if to emphasize the incapacity of conventional language to describe this distant domain, Plato often relies upon mythopoeic imagery when attempting to convey the sublimity of this region. Specifically, Plato speaks of a purer, higher province — a realm of plenary Being where universal essences reside in everlasting and immutable perfection. They are the source of whatever illumination the material world can claim, as well as the normative standard for all moral and spiritual insight. Only philosophers, Plato's pilgrims of light, can fully attain a vision of these eternal paradigms; as such, they alone are able to lift the veil of ignorance that Plato believes suffuses all things merely human.

Likewise, in considering Plato's conception of the human soul, we again encounter a strong dualistic tendency. Just as Plato divided reality into two disparate domains, he also insists upon a fundamental disjuncture between *soma* and *psyche*. Not only are we told of an extreme antagonism between the rational and appetitive elements within the soul (*Republic*, Bk. 4),[5] we are advised further of an even more pervasive opposition between the soul and all aspects of material existence. Indeed, there is much to suggest that Plato sees physical matter as a primary source of irrationality and chaos in the universe. In *Timaeus* (47e–48a), for example, matter is portrayed as recalcitrant to divine purpose; instead of the order and harmony intended by the *Demiurgos*, the effects of matter are described in terms of *ananke*, i.e., an errant necessity devoid of reason and purpose. In specifically human terms, Plato presents the "flesh" as a kind of prison-house, a continuous obstacle impeding the soul's spiritual mission. When, however, an individual is properly nourished by the sustenance of philosophy, the soul reveals itself for what it truly is — an alien presence anxious to grow wings and slip the bonds of this world.[6] These are images Plato presents with great poetic force in works such as *Phaedrus* and, in particular, the speeches of Diotima contained in *Symposium*. Collectively, they are part of a grand ascetic mandate Plato assigned to humanity that has had a profound and lasting effect upon Western spirituality.[7]

Even a cursory assessment of Plato's myriad influences would inevitably result in a multivolume study. Suffice it to say that in the areas of philosophy, religion, and literature, Platonism's impact upon Western culture can hardly

be overstated. With respect to philosophy, A.N. Whitehead's famous observation in *Process and Reality*— that the European philosophical tradition is essentially a series of footnotes to Plato — is not entirely hyperbolic. In virtually every area of philosophic speculation — aesthetics, metaphysics, political theory, epistemology, ethics, ontology — Plato was responsible for supplying much of the initial inspiration.

No less impressive is Plato's role in shaping the West's religious imagination. For more than 2,000 years, those longing to mend their fractured souls have sought their cure in the pages of Plato's dialogues. And herein lies the explanation of Plato's enduring effects upon a variety of religious traditions. Within Judaism, for example, the Book of Wisdom and the spiritual meditations of Philo Judaeus reflect strong Platonic elements, as does cabalism, which was greatly influenced by the Plotinian version of Plato's philosophy. Similar observations can also be made regarding Plato's impact upon the medieval religious and philosophical traditions of Islam.

But it was above all Plato's influence upon Christianity that constitutes one of his greatest contributions to Western civilization. From the inception of the Christian movement, the patristic authorities found Platonism highly compatible with the evolving doctrines of a fledgling faith, which explains the ease with which Clement of Alexandria, Origen, the Cappadocian Fathers, and, most significantly, St. Augustine[8] were able to embrace various forms of Platonic teaching. The final result was a theology vastly enriched by the language and imagery of Platonism, particularly in the areas of Christology and eschatology. Indeed, the influences here are so extensive that one is inclined to extend Nietzsche a modicum of credibility for his quip that Christianity was, in truth, "Platonism for the masses."

Throughout much of the medieval period in the West, the bulk of Plato's dialogues were inaccessible, a situation that would not change until the 13th and 14th centuries, when a variety of Arab translations and commentaries became available. The Platonic revival was facilitated further by the impending collapse of the Byzantine Empire, which prompted Eastern scholars conversant with classical literature to seek the relative security of Western Europe. Among other things, these migrations resulted in a Renaissance think tank known as the Florentine Academy,[9] dedicated in great measure to the promotion and dissemination of Platonism. The humanist rebellion against scholasticism, an insurgency determining much of the philosophic and literary enterprise of the 15th–16th centuries, was directly related to these Platonic renewals. Concurrently, the "new" science of Kepler and Galileo also drew inspiration from Plato, specifically from his insistence that nature would have to be "mathematized" before she would yield her secrets to man. In short, much of what

we look upon as emblematic of the Renaissance in a variety of intellectual categories is directly linked to the Platonic patrimony.

In the modern era, Plato continued to exert an impressive influence in a variety of areas. In 17th-century England a group known as the Cambridge Platonists[10] prescribed Platonic spiritualism as an antidote to the materialism of Gassendi and Hobbes. Plato's dialogues also proved to be a precious resource for a host of literary and poetic figures, including Coleridge, Emerson, Shelley, Blake, Thomas Taylor, W.B. Yeats, and Matthew Arnold.[11] Much of modern philosophy, particularly among certain German thinkers, remained closely tied to Platonic traditions, as seen in the thought of Leibniz, Schelling, Schleiermacher, and Schlegel. Neoplatonism also proved to be a preeminent aspect of Hegel's idealism, which in turn became a central feature in the philosophies of T.H. Green, F.H. Bradley, and B. Bosanquet.

Plato has also left his stamp on much of European political philosophy. In particular, his *Republic* inspired many imitations, including Campanella's *City of the Son*, More's *Utopia*, Bacon's *Atlantis*, and H.G. Wells' *A Modern Utopia*. The works of some of our most important legal theorists, individuals such as Grotius, Pufendorf, and Montesquieu, also bespeak indebtedness to the ancient Athenian.[12]

Presumably the foregoing has removed all doubt as to the immense influence Plato has exerted upon Western civilization. In truth, there is hardly an intellectual or spiritual dimension of modern life that is not in some way indebted to him. This remarkable legacy is, I believe, attributable to two factors. First, there is the enormous range of interests contained in the dialogues. Plato's manifold genius is improperly encompassed by the term "philosopher." He is also scientist, poet, political theorist, and priest — a man who burns incense as he does his geometry. As a result, there is something for everyone in his works. For the religiously inclined, there are dialogues such as *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*; logicians profit from *Parmenides* and *Sophist*; the mystic is richly rewarded by the spiritualism of *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*; and those with political interests can glean many insights from *Republic*, *Statesman*, and *Laws*.

The second explanation as to why Platonism became so prominent a feature of Western culture rests with Plato's extraordinary attributes as a thinker. Here we need to address a long-enduring misconception, for Plato was not the dogmatist some modern interpreters have insisted he was. On the contrary, his profound awareness of life's many complexities precluded formulaic solutions of any kind. In particular, Plato was deeply appreciative of human ambivalency. He understood, with unmatched clarity, that man is a creature with alarmingly disparate potentials — while he is capable of scaling the highest peaks, he is also capable of sinking into the deepest abyss.[13] In light of these

assessments, Plato suggests no system, no schema, no facile recipes. What he offers instead is an enduring message of hope. Though fully mindful of our propensities for misstep and folly, he believed nevertheless that there is something good, true, and beautiful within the human spirit, and that under reason's tutelage, these virtues can become sovereign forces in the affairs of men. This is the promise that has made Plato's voice timeless and the reason why his words continue to brace and inspire the human heart. Furthermore, it explains why none are owed a greater debt of gratitude than this prodigious architect of the Western tradition.

Notes

1. See Plutarch, "Reply to Colotes" 1126e–d.
2. The so-called "unwritten doctrines" are mentioned by Aristotle (*Physics* 4.2) and by Aristoxenus. They suggest Plato had an independent oral instruction separate and distinct from the exoteric teachings of the dialogues.
3. These works are also known as the "aporetic" dialogues, from the Greek word *aporein* (to doubt), because the questions raised in them remain unresolved.
4. A reference to the "Allegory of the Cave," one of the most celebrated images in all of Western literature.
5. Sigmund Freud acknowledged Platonic origins for his famous tripartite division of the soul, referring to the philosopher as the "divine" Plato.
6. It is safe to assume that much of Plato's thinking about the soul was derived from Socrates, who in turn was influenced by Orphic-Pythagorean traditions.
7. In this regard, the reader is advised to consult the chapter dealing with Plotinus.
8. In his *Confessions* (7.9), Augustine observed that Platonism contained virtually every major premise of the Christian faith with the exception of the Christ event (i.e., the Incarnation).
9. The Academy's establishment was underwritten by Cosimo de' Medici. The leading scholar at this institution was Marsilio Ficino, a devout Platonist.
10. The key figures among the Cambridge Platonists were Ralph Cudworth, Henry More, John Smith, and Benjamin Whichote.
11. What has been called "Platonic love" also stands behind a variety of noted relationships in Western history (e.g., Dante's fervor for Beatrice, Petrarch's love of Laura, and Spinoza's intellectual adoration of God).
12. See Shorey, *Platonism*, chapter 7.
13. It is precisely this dichotomy that Plato presents in *Republic*, Books 7–9, where the zenith of human potential is portrayed by the philosopher-king and its nadir in the person of the tyrant.

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13

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.)

Polymathic Genius

Dante Alighieri, the eminent Florentine poet and author of *The Divine Comedy*, proffered a famous description of Aristotle, referring to him as simply "the master of those who know."[1] For hundreds of years no one in Europe considered challenging this assessment — such was the potency and prestige enjoyed by Aristotle.[2] What was the basis for this authority? How does a single individual come to dominate for centuries the intellectual horizon of an entire culture? First, he was a remarkably prolific and diversified thinker. In fact, some of the ancient sources attribute as many as 400 titles to Aristotle, of which only about 50 treatises remain. The astonishing range of subjects reflected in the surviving texts attests to Aristotle's omnivorous intellect. Among the extant works we have studies involving logic, scientific method, zoology, biology, botany, theology, psychology, economics, metaphysics, philosophy of mind, meteorology, ethics, mechanics, mathematics, literary criticism, rhetoric, and political theory. In addition to the remarkable breadth of his interests, the quality of Aristotle's mind is perhaps the most telling explanation for the influence his views exerted. In particular, his capacity for detailed observation, meticulous analysis, and brilliant taxonomies is unparalleled in the history of Western thought. For these reasons, generations of philosophers, scientists, and theologians venerated his name and works.

Biographically, we know a great deal about Aristotle. He was born at Stagira, an Ionian colony in northern Greece. His father was a doctor who served as court physician to Amyntas II, the king of Macedonia and father of Philip II. At age 17 Aristotle journeyed to Athens, where he enrolled in Plato's Academy. He remained at Athens for 20 years, until Plato's death in 347 B.C., at which time he and several colleagues from the school traveled to Assos, a small city on the Troad. In all probability, the departure from Athens was prompted

at least in part by the anti–Macedonian harangues of Demosthenes. While in Asia Minor, he was supported by Hermias, a local tyrant and former member of the Academy. Aristotle eventually married Hermias' niece, Pythia, who bore him a daughter. In 345 B.C. Hermias was put to death by the Persians, at which point Aristotle resettled at Mytilene on the island of Lesbos, where he conducted much of the research (particularly in marine biology) that served as the foundation for many of his zoological treatises. In 342 Aristotle was invited by Philip of Macedon to assume the position of tutor for Alexander the Great, then 13 years old. Details of this three-year relationship are sparse and uncertain. After a brief stay at Stagira, Aristotle returned in 335 to Athens, where he established his own school. Essentially a research institute, the Lyceum included among its ranks several outstanding scholars, such as Theophrastus, Aristoxenus, and Eudemus. After the death of Alexander in 323 B.C., the stage was set in Athens for an anti–Macedonian witch-hunt. Aristotle was charged with impiety for a eulogistic poem dedicated to Hermias that the Athenians claimed was an attempt at deification. Aristotle fled Athens, reportedly declaring that he would not allow the Athenians to sin twice against philosophy—a reference to Socrates' fate. He relocated to Chalcis on the island of Euboea, where he died the next year (322 B.C.) of a digestive illness. In addition to his daughter, Aristotle also left behind a son from a relationship with a slave woman. His will has been preserved among the writings of Diogenes Laertius.

Aristotle's many works can be divided into two broad categories. First, we know of a series of dialogues that, with the exception of a few fragments, are now entirely lost. Modeled along Platonic lines, these works were clearly meant for a broad audience. Accordingly, their style was very different from the rather clinical tone we encounter in the extant literature.[3] Cicero, for example, was so impressed with their literary merits that he likened these dialogues to a "golden river."

The second group of writings, the only ones that have survived more or less intact, is a series of philosophical and scientific treatises originally unintended for publication. These works were produced after the dialogues and are best understood as acroastic[4] (i.e., a compilation of outlines and lecture notes used at the Lyceum). After Aristotle's death, these materials were subjected to a series of questionable redactions, which accounts for much of their disjointed and often unwieldy style. As a result, serious questions remain regarding the order of arrangement, content, and even the authorship of certain treatises (e.g., Metaphysics).[5] According to Plutarch, this material received its definitive editing at the hands of Andronicus of Rhodes in the 1st century B.C. It is essentially this edition that we rely upon today.

Given the enormous expanse of Aristotle's interests, it is impossible to offer an adequate summary of his many works. Accordingly, only the briefest synopsis of a few key areas will be offered here. Perhaps no aspect of the surviving works is more demonstrative of the acuity and sophistication of Aristotle's mind than the logical treatises. In all, there are six titles[6] contained in the so-called Organon (meaning "tool" or "instrument"). Aided by the preliminary activities of Greek mathematics, the sophistic movement, and several Platonic dialogues (e.g., *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Parmenides*, and *Statesman*), Aristotle launched his own investigation of the mechanisms of human cognition, including the faults and deficiencies that impair scientific inquiry. Specifically, he analyzed the various modes of human inquiry; the fallacies that disrupt rational discourse and discovery; the means by which first principles are attained and certified; and the terms and conditions necessary for the acquisition of scientific knowledge. In the course of this research, Aristotle not only invented formal logic (a remarkable achievement in itself), he also became the first thinker in history to systematically identify the rules of scientific demonstration. The originality Aristotle displayed in these matters is matched only by the impact his observations had on the history of Western speculation.

Aristotle was also interested in a field of philosophy known as ontology — the nature of Being. Here, as he did in a variety of other areas, Aristotle emerged from the broad shadow cast by his mentor.[7] While both thinkers agreed that "form" constituted genuine reality, Plato had insisted particulars were mere exemplifications of form — inferior images distantly related to a higher, more authentic realm. For Aristotle, however, there were no disembodied universals, just as there was no supersensible region distinct from phenomena. Indeed, he was inclined to dismiss such otherworldly speculation as little more than poetic musing. In his view, reality was an amalgam of form and matter, which meant individual objects were the sole instantiation of form.[8] Accordingly, Aristotle identified concrete particulars (this man, this horse, this book, etc.), not hypostatized essences, as the fundamental ontic unit. These ontological distinctions are graphically portrayed in Raphael's School of Athens, in which Plato the metaphysician points to heaven as Aristotle gestures in a decidedly more terrestrial direction.

With regard to natural philosophy, Aristotle once again offered a more practical and empirically oriented perspective than many of his contemporaries. Specifically, he displayed a general loyalty to the Ionian scientific tradition that had shaped much of his thought from the outset. This explains his rejection of both the static conception of nature advanced by the Eleatics and the mechanistic theories of Empedocles and the Atomists. According to

his analysis, nature was best understood as an "innate impulse to movement"—a dynamic complex of objects and creatures, each striving to attain a fulfillment consistent with its nature. In other words, the natural environment reveals an orderly progression suggestive of a universal quest for growth and development. The objective of this ubiquitous dynamism is a state of *entelechy*: the transformation of latent potential into full potency. Significantly, this quest for complete achievement of form and function was not part of a mechanical unfolding—Aristotle never presents the constituent elements of nature as cogs in some eternal wheelwork. Instead, Aristotle's vision of nature is that of a teleological order in which nothing is done in vain and everything moves toward its best possible state.

During the Middle Ages these last points were interpreted to imply the presence of a conscious, efficient cause impelling nature along a divinely appointed path. In truth, the Stagirite consistently denied a direct godly presence in the world's operation. In fact, he believed the activities of nature and the affairs of humankind were entirely independent of providential influence. While Aristotle does offer a theology of sorts in his Physics and Metaphysics, the deity depicted in such works is hardly the God of Abraham. This divinity neither creates nor redeems—prevented from the former by the strictures of Greek scientific reasoning (nihil ex nihilo) and from the latter by the fact that Aristotle's God is a self-dependent Being detached from, and indifferent to, all lesser existence. As a result, God's sole activity is the unceasing contemplation of the one object worthy of divine consideration—himself. Accordingly, God must be understood as "pure mind thinking itself." In the end, however, Aristotle does assign God one critical function in the cosmic scheme. He is identified as the universal inspiration for physical motion[9]—the *proton kinoin* (prime mover) who calls forth the emulative ardor of all existence, engendering thereby the kinesis observable throughout nature. He is, in short, not the heavenly father of scripture but the *terminus ad quem* for the entire universe.

Aristotle's natural philosophy was also a major influence in shaping his views on the human good. Although man is unique in the sense that he brings intentionality to the world (specifically, a capacity to consciously design and alter the environment in which he lives), he remains, nevertheless, part of the larger teleological economy governing existence. As such, he strives to attain the form and purpose natural to his kind, motivated by an understanding that the achievement of human areté (excellence) is the necessary precondition for *eudaemonia*.[10] Unfortunately, the path to human fulfillment is fraught with opportunities for missteps and too often men stumble along the way. Assets such as money, power, and status may possess instrumental worth, but

they can never substitute for the ultimate ends of life. The question remains: What, in Aristotle's view, is the final calling of a human being? Toward what should human endeavor ultimately be dedicated? His answer relates to an extraordinary capacity that humans alone possess. In addition to the nutritional growth and reproductive functions we share with all other life, we are also deliberative and conceptualizing creatures capable of grasping the universal and the ideal. The highest life for man, therefore, the one activity most fitting for creatures of our own sort, is the rational contemplation (theoria) of eternal and unchanging things. This, in Aristotle's opinion, is the supreme human vocation, allowing man to uniquely transcend the prosaic rhythms of mere existence. In particular, it is the philosopher who most readily grasps these enduring realities and, accordingly, qualifies as the preeminently blissful individual. Such a person, Aristotle solemnly declares, enjoys a special kinship with the gods.

Efforts to summarize the philosophical and scientific impact of Aristotle are greatly complicated by two factors: first, the many domains in which his thinking served for centuries as the foundation of learned understanding and analysis; and second, the degree to which his ideas have become so integral to the West's intellectual landscape that it is no longer possible to identify Aristotelian cause with larger cultural effect. With these complexities in mind, we begin our assessment with the Christological debates of the early Christian era. These disputes were clearly the greatest obstacle facing the new faith's doctrinal future, centering as they did on the fundamental matter of Christ's identity. Specifically, Christianity had to resolve a series of complex relational questions: What was Jesus' relationship to God and to humanity? How were divine and human elements combined in the person of Jesus? What was the nature of the affinities suggested by the Trinity doctrine? These issues generated a spate of diverse and highly contentious opinions that eventually hardened into full-blown heresies (e.g., Docetism, Adoptionism, Monarchianism, Arianism, Apollonarianism, Nestorianism, Monophysitism, etc.). The rancor and confusion engendered by these discordant beliefs not only prohibited the emergence of uniform dogma but also, in some sense, threatened the church's very existence. Accordingly, a series of ecumenical councils were convened (Nicea A.D. 325, Constantinople A.D. 381, Ephesus A.D. 431, and Chalcedon A.D. 451) in an attempt to achieve orthodoxy. What is typically overlooked in this context is the fact that the lexical medium in which these complex debates were conducted was furnished in great measure by a pagan philosopher who lived more than six centuries earlier. Aristotelian terminology, such as substance, essence, form, matter, quality, property, and so on, served as the

conceptual tools with which crucial Christological problems were framed, discussed, and resolved. Ironically, then, it was a pagan rationalist who, despite espousing many views entirely incompatible with Christian teaching,[11] nevertheless helped shape the church's formative theology.

Aristotle's influence upon Christianity continued during medieval times, which, thanks to him, were neither as "dark" nor as unproductive as commonly assumed. There was, for instance, a remarkable cultural ferment among Arabs, Syrians, Jews, Persians, and Turks from the 9th to the 12th centuries, based in part on the teachings of Aristotle. By the early 12th century, Latin Europe also experienced the impact of this literature as it began to flow westward, primarily from Constantinople.[12] Understandably, Aristotle's rationalism was an immediate source of concern for church officials but religious authorities correctly surmised that the power and allure of this literature made an unqualified censorship of Aristotle impossible. Instead, the church adopted a strategy of judicious accommodation. Properly interpreted and correctly applied, the teachings of Aristotle might be made to serve the religious and theological mission of Christendom. In other words, Aristotle was selectively pressed into service on behalf of the faith — a recruitment that would both enrich and vex Christianity for centuries to come. Given the church's cultural hegemony at the time, this tactic of cautious adaptation had one tellingly significant consequence — it embedded Aristotle in the intellectual mainstream of Europe. From this point on, there could be no serious consideration of natural science, metaphysics, logic, theology, or ethics without appeal to the opinions and approaches of Aristotle. In particular, Aristotle rapidly became the universal foundation for Christian philosophy, including Thomism, Scotism, and Ockhamism.

Another field in which Aristotle left an indelible mark was the biological sciences. Indeed, in a very real sense, Aristotle must be considered the father of biology, having single-handedly laid the foundations for zoology, anatomy, and physiology. Combined, the treatises available to us make reference to more than 500 animal species and include a variety of extraordinary insights, all the more remarkable when one considers that their formulation occurred more than 2,300 years ago.[13] Aristotle was, for instance, fully conversant with the distinction between oviparous and viviparous creatures. He recognized the mammalian nature of the cetaceans (whales, dolphins, etc.), and he confirmed the difference between bony and cartilaginous fish. He also recognized that ruminants had four-chambered stomachs, and he was the first to formulate the principle of homology (likeness in structure between parts of different organisms, such as legs, wings, and fins). He even documented the manner of reproduction in cephalopods, a feat that remained unduplicated

until the 19th century. Moreover, Aristotle's extant works reveal an unprecedented classificatory genius. Indeed, his accomplishments in this regard so impressed Charles Darwin that he described modern taxonomists such as Linnaeus and Cuvier as but "mere school boys" in comparison to Aristotle.[14]

The wealth and lucidity of Aristotle's mind has no finer illustration than the treatises relating to logic and scientific method. Aristotle may not have been the first to manifest the investigative ardor we associate with the phrase "scientific spirit" (that distinction belongs to the early Milesians), but he was responsible for lending that spirit much of its subsequent language, logic, and methodology. This was accomplished in a series of critically important works collectively known as the Organon.[15] Here, Aristotle presents a mechanism that he believed would lend a new validity to the claims of *episteme* (formal logic). Technically, logic is not a branch of science but rather a device designed to preclude distortion and falsity. And while logical precision of this sort may not be imperative in areas such as rhetoric and poetry, in science it was essential to the extent that the latter is uniquely dedicated to the attainment of truth. In these matters, Aristotle is to be commended: not only did he devise a means for extracting necessary inferences from existing premises (deductive syllogism), he also must be credited with having clarified the aims and purposes of scientific enterprise itself, which he defined as the systematic attempt to arrive at the underlying causes of phenomena. Viewed from a 21st century perspective, these achievements may seem a bit pedestrian. But the advances in modern logic and scientific technique registered later by individuals such as Frege, Russell, Whitehead, and others should not serve to minimize the magnitude of Aristotle's accomplishment. In truth, much of the credit he immodestly assigns himself at the conclusion of *Sophistical Refutations* is merited.[16] His investigation of "reasoning" was fundamentally without parallel and constituted the specific moment in history when the human mind began to consider the intricacies of its own operation. In this way, Aristotle not only established a system of logic that remained authoritative until the late 19th century, he also defined the norms of science, infusing them with a new methodological rigor that, for the first time, included the idea of scientific "proof." For these reasons and a variety of others, it is appropriate to view Aristotle as the man who first taught the Western mind how to think.

Unquestionably, Aristotle was a colossus in the history of Western speculation. But not even his prodigious intellect could avoid certain inevitable limitations imposed by time and place and, as a result, this "master of those who know" advanced more than his share of benighted conclusions. In particular, Aristotle was generally unappreciative of the need for scientific exper-

imentation, inclined to undervalue the potential of mathematics for the study of nature,[17] and was not above bullying the facts in ways designed to support preconceived notions. It has also been argued that Aristotle had an obstructive effect upon certain fields such as astronomy, given the enormous authority his errant views enjoyed for centuries.[18]

Despite the obvious substance of these defects, in truth they say less about the deficiencies of Aristotle's intellectual capital than they do about the benefits of twenty-three centuries of hindsight. They illustrate how a time-enriched retrospection not only enhances understanding but also tends to instill a spirit of superiority in those looking back. Once, however, Aristotle's legacy is placed in proper historical context, once we consider the state of scientific and philosophic affairs elsewhere in the world during the 4th century B.C., the enormity of Aristotle's achievement becomes incontrovertible. Not only was he the West's premier observational scientist for nearly 2,200 years, not only did he initiate a variety of unprecedented inquiries and establish classificatory systems that remain foundational today, he was, above all, the greatest general contributor to the foundations of European intellectualism. In short, more than any other thinker — more than Descartes, Newton, or Einstein — Aristotle arranged the mental furniture of the Occidental mind. When we speak, therefore, of those habits of thought uniquely characteristic of the Western tradition, we are, in great measure, referring to an Aristotelian inheritance.

Notes

1. Inferno canto 4, line 131.
2. Medieval thinkers found it unnecessary to mention Aristotle's name. They simply referred to him as "the Philosopher."
3. Thomas Gray, an 18th-century British poet, said that reading Aristotle was like eating hay.
4. From the Greek term *akroasthai*, meaning "to attend a lecture."
5. For a summary of the process by which Aristotle's works were transmitted to subsequent generations, see Strabo 13.54.
6. The works contained in the Organon are Categories, On Interpretation, Prior Analytics, Posterior Analytics, Topica, and Sophistical Refutation.
7. Still, the emergence should not be overemphasized. There are many facets of Aristotle's thought that remain thoroughly Platonic.
8. The only "pure" forms for Aristotle are God, the intelligences that animate the celestial spheres, and (perhaps) human reason.
9. In addition to the prime mover, Aristotle also mentions other "intelligences" responsible for the motion of the lower spheres (i.e., those beneath the level of the fixed stars).
10. This term has been poorly translated into English as "happiness." A better rendering might be "human flourishing."
11. For example, his ideas on the nature of the human soul and his views of God as the "Unmoved Mover."

12. The other important source of Aristotelian literature at the time was Muslim Spain, particularly cities such as Cordova, Toledo, and Seville.

13. Aristotle's biological works were without equal until the time of William Harvey (1578–1657).

14. Letter from Charles Darwin to William Ogle (1882).

15. Perhaps the most important works are Prior Analytics and Posterior Analytics.

16. Aristotle concludes this work by reminding readers that they should be "heartily grateful for our discoveries."

17. It was specifically this short-sightedness that resulted in a revolt against Aristotelian science in the 17th century led by Kepler and Galileo.

18. Responsibility for these effects cannot be assigned to Aristotle but must instead be attributed to those who made him into a dogmatic system-builder. Aristotle was not a Schoolman, as Werner Jaeger demonstrated in his *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of His Development* (1934).

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14

Alexander the Great (356–323 B.C.)

Disseminator of Greek Culture

Alexander of Macedon has been called the greatest conqueror in Western civilization and perhaps the world (Rogers 286). His exploits have earned him a place in the national literature of at least 80 countries, including nations as far afield as Iceland and China.[1] The unbroken string of victories he recorded during his eleven-year, 22,000-mile campaign is unmatched in the history of warfare and provided a paradigm for the likes of Julius Caesar[2] and Napoleon Bonaparte, among many others. Such is the renown of Alexander of Macedon, the man the Romans would later describe as "Great." Without question, the bulk of his fame and reputation were acquired on the battlefield — his lust for combat is without parallel in Western history.[3] Still, it is questionable whether his name would have enjoyed the luster it has had for 2,300 years had he been nothing more than a gifted commander. Like other "great" men, Alexander was not a one-dimensional figure — not simply a warrior. If the ancient sources can be trusted, Alexander was a complex individual with widely variant interests. A man-at-arms first and foremost, it seems he was also concerned with religious, political, scientific, economic, and philosophical issues as well. Likewise, complexities have been noted with regard to Alexander's character and temperament. The extant imagery presents a man who is at times remarkably munificent, clement, and high-minded but who is also prone to appalling fits of violence — not all of which were restricted to the battlefield.

Alexander was born at Pella in 356 B.C.; he was the son of Philip II and Olympias, the daughter of King Neoptolemus of Epirus. Geneologically, he claimed patrilineal descent from Heracles and matrilineal ties to Achilles.

From 13 to 16 years of age, Alexander was tutored by the noted philosopher, Aristotle. In 340 B.C. Alexander received his first experience of command while his father was absent in the East pressing an attack against Byzantium. Two years later he played a critical role in the Battle of Chaeronea, where he commanded the Macedonian left wing and broke Thebes' vaunted Sacred Band. In 336 B.C. Philip was assassinated while celebrating his daughter's wedding. Alexander was soon proclaimed successor by the Macedonian army and proceeded to eliminate those responsible for his father's death as well as any who might challenge his claim to the throne.

Upon securing his authority, Alexander moved to consolidate Macedonian interests in Thrace and the northern territories. In rapid succession, he defeated the Triballi, the Gatae, and the Illyrians. While engaged in these campaigns, Thebes foolishly attempted to slip the Macedonian yoke. Alexander responded ruthlessly by razing the city, sparing only a few religious sites and the home of Pindar. Six thousand Thebans were killed and 20,000 sold into slavery. Having etched this bloody example into the collective consciousness of the Greeks, Alexander prepared to launch his campaign against the Achaemenid Dynasty. In the spring of 334 B.C., he crossed the Hellespont with an army of 30,000 foot soldiers and 5,000 horsemen — he was twenty-two years old. Three years later, at age twenty-five, he was Lord of Asia. Although he fought scores of battles throughout this period and would fight many more on his relentless trek eastward, there were three signature battles against the Persians where Alexander earned his cognomen — Granicus (334 B.C.), Issus (333 B.C.) and Gaugamela (331 B.C.). In each of these victories, Alexander displayed the tactical skill and personal courage that secured him a place of honor among history's great commanders.

Despite his remarkable achievements on the battlefield, Alexander's authority as commander in chief did not go unchallenged. Our sources tell us that on at least two occasions the army defiantly rejected Alexander's directives. The first mutiny occurred in July 326 B.C. at the Beas River, where the army, after eight bloody years of combat, refused to advance any further. No amount of exhortation from Alexander could budge the men. Reluctantly, Alexander turned back and began a long withdrawal to Susa in what is now southern Iran. Here, Alexander and eighty-seven of his Companions (the king's inner circle) took Persian brides according to Oriental ritual. Some have cited these marriages as proof of Alexander's intent to create a new Irano-Macedonian ruling class for his empire (e.g., W.W. Tarn).

In June 324 B.C. at Opis (Baghdad), a second mutiny occurred in reaction to Alexander's ongoing attempts to create a hybrid army.[4] Among other things, these efforts included the integration of Persian horsemen into crack Mace-

donian cavalry units. When, in addition, Alexander announced his intention to discharge the Macedonian veterans no longer fit for service, an open rebellion ensued. The matter was eventually resolved and a great feast of reconciliation conducted where Greek and Persian alike celebrated in ecumenical fashion. It is specifically this event that has encouraged the view among some scholars that Alexander ultimately sought *Homonoia* (unity/concord) for all humanity. A year later at Babylon, on 10 June 323 B.C., Alexander's meteoric career came to a close — he was barely 33 years old.

A variety of theories have been advanced concerning the cause of death. According to some, Antipater, the Macedonian regent in Greece, sent a deadly poison to the king via his son Cassander, which was then mixed in Alexander's wine. Another view maintains Alexander died of alcohol poisoning. The Macedonians had a well-deserved reputation for prodigious drinking, often conducted in the form of contests.[5] Plutarch (*Lives*, "Alexander" 70.1–2), for instance, tells of an episode during which the winner consumed four large pitchers of wine. He won a talent for his efforts but died three days later of alcohol toxicity, as did another forty-one contestants! Several ancient sources report that Alexander had been engaged in heavy drinking immediately before taking ill, lending credence to this explanation. A less colorful theory, but one to which most scholars subscribe, is that Alexander died of malaria. The Babylonian canals were mosquito infested, and insect-borne diseases must have been a serious problem throughout the region.

In any event, his death provoked two predictable results. First, there was a violent struggle for power in which Alexander's half-brother, his mother, his wife (Roxane), and his son (Alexander IV) all perished. Second, in the absence of Alexander's unifying charisma, the empire rapidly disintegrated into five distinct units, each controlled by one of the *Diadochi* (successors): Cassander (Macedonia and Greece), Ptolemy (Egypt), Lysimachus (Thrace), Seleucus (Syria), and Antigonus (Asia Minor).

No accurate assessment of Alexander or his legacy can be made without mention of the military units that propelled him to victory. Accordingly, our question becomes this: How did a group of uncouth, disorderly "highlanders"[6] from the fringes of the Greek world develop the most efficient fighting machine of the day and topple the world's greatest empire? Much of the answer to this question rests with Alexander's father, Philip II, a man of enormous energy and ambition. As Alexander himself acknowledged at Opis (Arrian 7.9), it was Philip who brought the Macedonians down from the hills and converted them from ill-clad vagabonds into a people feared and respected by Greeks and barbarians alike. Above all, it was Philip who created the Macedonian

army that proved *aniketos* (invincible) from Mount Olympus to the Himalaya mountains.

In his youth, Philip spent three years as a hostage at Thebes — a common practice in antiquity designed to ensure political and moral obligation.[7] During this period, he was exposed to two of the greatest military strategists in antiquity: Epaminondas and Pelopidas, the men who shattered the myth of Spartan invincibility at Leuctra in 371 B.C. The tactics Philip learned at Thebes, including the coordinated use of infantry and horsemen, the significance of elite units, and particularly the deployment of oblique formations, would serve the Macedonians well in the future, as they would modern commanders such as Frederick the Great.[8]

But Philip was also an innovator in his own right. Most significantly, he conceived of an entirely new and dynamic role for mounted forces. Traditional hoplite warfare had assigned cavalry a secondary role in combat. The real work was conducted by the infantry while horsemen were expected to do little more than harry and skirmish. In contrast, Philip's army called upon its heavy cavalry, the so-called Companions (*hetairoi*), to serve as the primary strike force in the Macedonian *blitzkrieg*. These mounted troops were equipped with helmuts, scale-armor, shields, thrusting pikes, and swords. The horses were also armored with protective headpieces and breastplates. Typically, the Companion cavalry would attack from the right wing in a wedge-shaped formation seeking to penetrate gaps in the enemy lines. The left wing functioned as a kind of defensive anchor, expected to stand and absorb the enemy's offensive blow while the heavy cavalry spread chaos within the opponent's ranks.

With regard to infantry, Philip's forces were a composite of various foot units, including an elite corps of "Shield Bearers" (*hypaspistai*), light infantry men (*peltasts*), and irregulars (*psiloi*) comprised of darters, archers, and slingers. But the most distinctive feature of the Macedonian phalanx was the *pezetaeri* who bore the *sarissa*, an iron-tipped pike some 16 feet in length. When properly deployed, these pikemen formed a barrier largely impervious to either infantry or cavalry assault. The wall of iron created by these murderous shafts proved highly effective in Asia.[9]

In addition to these innovations, Philip is also credited with having streamlined his army in an effort to achieve maximum mobility. He did this by radically reducing the Macedonian baggage train as well as the number of camp followers. Moreover, he subjected his men to a rigorous program of drill and physical conditioning, preparing them to fight under all conditions year round.[10] These refinements explain the remarkable rapidity with which Alexander reacted to Theban disloyalty in 335 B.C.[11] They also signal a critical transformation in the protocols of Greek warfare — the abandonment of the

traditional citizen militia in favor of a well-equipped, highly skilled, and intensely disciplined professional army.[12] These were the military resources that allowed Philip to project Macedonian power throughout Thrace, Thessaly, and mainland Greece. They were also the assets that nurtured his dream of Eastern conquests.

The idea of a pan–Hellenic crusade against the Great King was not new. In his *Panegyricus* (c. 380 B.C.), the Athenian rhetorician Isocrates had encouraged a Hellenic holy war against Persia, describing it as more of "a sacred mission" than a military expedition. In later works, he specifically identifies Philip as the perfect candidate to lead such a campaign, promising him that after humbling the barbarians, there would be nothing left for him but to receive honors befitting a god (*Letter to Philip* II.5 and *To Philip* 113–15). Additional motivation may have come from Xenophon's *Anabasis*, not because it offered a message of pan–Hellenic brotherhood but because it was in essence a manifesto of Persian vulnerabilities. For men like Philip and Alexander, the successful retreat of the 10,000 Greek mercenaries from deep within Asia meant one thing — Persia, with its spectacular wealth, was ripe for the taking.

Unfortunately for Philip, he would not have the opportunity to plunge his spear into Asian soil. He was assassinated at Aegae by a disgruntled bodyguard in 336 B.C. It then fell to Alexander to cross the Hellespont at the head of the superb fighting force created by his father. As events would soon demonstrate, Alexander, youth notwithstanding, was a brilliant leader worthy of his father's patrimony.

Alexander's many virtues as commander in chief are too numerous for detailed treatment here, but a few of his most celebrated attributes demand mention.[13] First and foremost, Alexander's definitive essence as *strategos* was his boldness — both in terms of the way he deployed his forces and his "high-risk" style of leadership. In summing up his *History*, Arrian (7.28) observes that Alexander's first instinct was to aggressively assume the offensive, a tactic that not only stunned and confused his opponents but often intimidated them as well. His brazen charge across the Granicus (334 B.C.), despite unfavorable terrain; his willingness to press the attack at Gaugamela (331 B.C.) against a force several times larger[14]; and his intrepid night crossing of the Hydaspes (326 B.C.) against Porus all illustrate the trademark audacity he brought to the battlefield. One should not conclude, however, that Alexander's boldness was the product of reckless impulsivity. On the contrary, all of his important campaigns were preceded by detailed and extensive planning. Wherever possible, unfamiliar territories were thoroughly reconnoitered in advance of hostilities, and significant energy was also expended in establishing an adequate commissariat.[15] In addition, Alexander did not allow his enthusiasm for taking

the fight to the enemy to blur sound strategic thinking. After his victory at Issus, for example, he cut short his pursuit of Darius, electing instead to secure his rear by denying the Persian fleet key strategic bases at Tyre and Gaza (Arrian 2.17).

The area in which one is legitimately entitled to speak of Alexander's recklessness involves the personal risks he routinely ran throughout his career. No general in history has so readily shared in the perils of combat as Alexander — not Caesar,[16] Frederick, Napoleon, Wellington, or Grant. In comparison to the Macedonian, all of these men were practitioners of chateau generalship — they led from the rear. Alexander's motives in continuously exposing himself to lethal dangers are impossible to ascertain. He may have deemed them necessary to inspire and motivate his troops, or it may have been part of a personal code of heroic conduct inspired by Homer's *Iliad*.[17] In any event, it is not too much to say that Alexander waged war as if he questioned his own mortality. As a result, he sustained nine significant wounds from virtually every weapon known in antiquity — sword, lance, dart, and catapult missile. In 325 B.C. a severe chest wound from a Mallian arrow nearly cost Alexander his life.

Another important aspect of Alexander's leadership that almost certainly contributed to his astonishing success was his keen appreciation of military psychology. The ancient sources consistently make clear the lengths to which Alexander attempted to establish and maintain high morale among his men. Plutarch describes him as a naturally generous man whose beneficence increased proportionally as a river of Persian gold and silver flowed into his coffers.[18] Along these same lines, Arrian (7.4–5) tells of the lavish wedding gifts Alexander bestowed at Susa and of his willingness to cancel the army's collective debt — a sum of 20,000 talents. When troops were no longer fit for service, he extended veterans liberal pensions and bonuses (Arrian 7.12). When a man distinguished himself in combat, he received a gold crown; when he fell honorably in battle, he was accorded a splendid funeral and received posthumous recognition commensurate with his courage. No expense was spared on the many victory celebrations, which typically included several days of feasting, athletic contests, and artistic performances. And most important of all, Alexander made concerted efforts to put a human face on his monarchy. During a lull in the early phases of the Asian campaign, he sent the recently married troops home to spend the winter months with their wives, a policy that earned him great affection among the men. Gestures such as these sent a powerful message: beyond royal rank and privilege, Alexander was a brother in arms sensitive to the needs and burdens of the common solider. With few exceptions, they earned Alexander a fund of good will with his men, allowing

him to demand degrees of exertion and sacrifice a potentate such as Darius III could never hope to match.

However, as we noted earlier, Alexander was a complex man in whom acts of compassion and decency were often offset by deeds of egregious violence. The same man who chivalrously extended Darius' family every courtesy was also capable of exemplary brutality, such as that administered at Tyre where 8,000 Tyrians were put to the sword and another 2,000 sent to the cross. Acts such as these provide compelling testimony against those portraying Alexander as humanist crusader.[19] Specifically, they suggest the possibility that Alexander's true message was the gospel of cold steel and that his career had less to do with lofty gestures and ecumenical ideals than it did with the dictates of *realpolitik*.

Who, then, is the genuine Alexander? Does his name merit hagiography or vitriol? Was he a great-souled visionary dedicated to a benign unification of the *oikoumene* (the inhabited world), or the man on horseback prepared to soak the earth in blood? Answering this question is a particularly thorny challenge because in death, great men have a troublesome habit of becoming all things to all people, a process that began almost immediately in the case of Alexander and continues to this day.[20] One thing, however, over which there is little or no debate is the magnitude and significance of his achievement. Few men have left deeper impressions on the sands of time than Alexander III of Macedon.

In general terms, Alexander's most obvious achievement involves the wide-scale dissemination of Greek culture — from Greece to the Punjab, from the Danube to Nubia. An empire of more than 2 million square miles came to experience a degree of cultural unity hitherto unimagined. As a result, Plato and Aristotle were debated at Susa; Babylon come to know Aeschylean tragedy; and the Homeric epics were recited at Ceylon. In addition to literature and philosophy, Greek art also became an important cultural force in Asia. In particular, the Greek kingdom of Bactria played a key role in projecting Hellenic art throughout much of northwest India and Central Asia. It was here that Greek artists lent their genius to an Eastern faith, where Buddhist piety and *Yavana*[21] aesthetics combined to form the Gandhara style. When Mahayana Buddhism reached the area in the 1st century A.D., there were no precedents for portraying the "Enlightened One" in human form. Traditional representations were purely symbolic (e.g., the Bo-tree, an empty throne, a parasol, etc.). Greek craftsmen addressed this deficiency by Indianizing their Apollo paradigm. Specifically, they created a composite facial portrait blending Eastern and Western features (e.g., Asian eyes combined with wavy hair and

a long narrow nose). In addition to visage, standing figures of Buddha from this period reveal a clear indebtedness to the postural styles of classical sculptors such as Polycleitus. Over time, the effects of these and other facets of Greek art, including certain architectural elements, were felt as far away as China and Japan.

In addition to instigating a vast intercultural assimilation, Alexander played a direct role in promoting economic development throughout his empire. He accomplished this in part by unifying the many concurrently operating monetary systems, replacing them with a new monometallism (silver) that brought Asia fully into line with Greek (i.e., Attic) numismatic standards for the first time.[22] Moves such as these had the effect of greatly reducing economic localism in favor of a vast new international marketplace, promoting both commercial and cultural exchange. Moreover, Alexander's decision to circulate much of the immense wealth he appropriated from the Achaemenids provided an extraordinary stimulus to commerce and industry. Whereas the Persians had hoarded tons of gold and silver bullion at Babylon, Arabela, Susa, and Persepolis, Alexander elected to convert tens of thousands of talents[23] into specie. By minting and circulating millions of standardized coins, Alexander engendered an economic explosion that materially altered the course of history in Asia as well as the entire Mediterranean world.

Another of Alexander's more important achievements relates to his penchant for city building. These activities are well attested in the ancient sources, and despite the fact that the numbers are often exaggerated due to confusion over genuine cities versus mere military outposts, the fact remains Alexander was one of history's most ambitious urban developers. We know of at least 16 cities founded in his name, none more impressive or historically significant than the great "Alexandria" established on the Nile delta in 331 B.C. In its day, this city was an unrivaled source of culture and learning — an intellectual beacon for the likes of Euclid, Herophilus, Eratosthenes, Heron, and many others. The city's library was antiquity's largest repository of scholarly texts — perhaps as many as 700,000 volumes. Much of the ancient literature we possess today can be traced to the works meticulously assembled at this facility. The library's sister institution, the Museum, was the West's first state-funded research center where scholars from around the world pursued their interests on a subsidized basis.

Furthermore, Alexandria was for centuries the most cosmopolitan city on earth, a key facilitator in the great synthesis of East and West emblematic of Hellenistic culture. Egyptians, Greeks, Jews, Syrians, Romans and Arabs converged to form one of history's greatest cultural stews. The importance of these cross-cultural exchanges cannot be overstated. It was at Alexandria, for

instance, that the Torah was first translated into Greek (i.e., the Septuagint), which made Jewish religious wisdom available to the Gentile world.[24] Here, too, the eminent Jewish Platonist, Philo Judaeus, developed his *logos* doctrine that would later prove so important for the spiritual foundations of Christianity. We should also note that much of what we associate with the Golden Age of Islam — its philosophy, science, mathematics, and medicine — was drawn initially from the rich resources of Alexandria starting in the 7th century A.D. These Islamic appropriations later cast the Muslim world in a rather peculiar role as stewards of the Greek heritage. As Europe lapsed into its medieval slumber, the Arabs continued to fan the precious embers of Hellenism, eventually reintroducing them to the West during the High Middle Ages. All of this suggests that if Alexander had done no more than establish this great metropolis, he would remain one of history's greatest luminaries.

It is also necessary to consider the profound effects the Greek language had upon the development of Western history. As a direct result of Alexander's conquests, Greek rapidly become the empire's *lingua franca*. As such, it served as a bonding agent for the great convergence of cultures that occurred after Alexander's death. Specifically, the presence of a common linguistic medium tended to lessen many of the barriers and obstacles traditionally dividing Hellenes and "barbarians."[25] By facilitating a variety of unprecedented political, economic, and cultural exchanges, the Greek tongue helped to diminish localism and widen cultural identities. Evidence for the significance of these developments is found in the example of an obscure Judean sect of the 1st century A.D. Were it not for the extensive linguistic highway created by Alexander, this fledgling faith that went on to become one of the world's major religions might have remained little more than a provincial curiosity. In great measure, Christianity's unlikely victory is attributable to the fact that proselytizers such as Saul of Tarsus, a Hellenized Jew fluent in Greek, had at their disposal a ubiquitous instrument of communication capable of reaching an audience as diverse as it was geographically extensive. In brief, the Greek language was the Internet of antiquity, without which the "Good News" would not have reached the Gentiles and the West would not have received the gifts of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

In sum, the career of Alexander the Great was a seismic event that irrevocably altered the course of world history. Any comprehensive attempt to assay his impact would require nothing less than a separate volume. Accordingly, we must be satisfied with abbreviated accounts such as those listed above, and with general summaries such as Josiah Ober's admirable assessment: "It is not too much to say that to the extent that modern western culture

is defined by a 'Greco-Roman-Judaic-Christian' inheritance, it is a product of the world that grew up in the wake of Alexander's conquests" (45).

Notes

1. The highly fictionalized "history" of Alexander's career known as the *Alexander Romance* was responsible for much of this dissemination.

2. Plutarch ("Sayings of the Romans" 206.4) tells us that Caesar wept as he invidiously compared his own youthful achievements with those of Alexander.

3. Even his name implies combat. In Greek, "Alexander" means "parry the man" (i.e., to avoid or ward off a blow).

4. Another source of friction between Alexander and his Macedonian troops was the former's adoption of oriental customs. While in Egypt (332–331 B.C.), Alexander had not only encouraged pharaonic status, he had also traveled to the Oracle at Siwah, where he was greeted as a son of the Egyptian god Ammon. In addition, Alexander attempted to adopt the Persian custom of *proskynesis*, a prostrational gesture indicating respect. Among Persians, this display had no religious significance, but in Greek eyes it bore cultic connotations. To perform *proskynesis* toward Alexander was, therefore, a demeaning and servile act. Alexander was forced to abandon this aspect of his Orientalizing.

5. Philip was a notorious *philopotes*, or lover of drink, and Demosthenes likened him to a sponge, a view seconded by the historian Theopompus of Chios, who claims Philip often went into battle drunk (see Athenaeus 10.435).

6. The word "Macedonian" means "highlander."

7. The system of royal pages established by Philip was a *de facto* hostage arrangement designed to control the Macedonian aristocracy. Alexander continued the practice, assuring himself of the fidelity of Antipater by taking the latter's three sons with him to Asia.

8. See J. Keegan, *The Mask of Command*, 86.

9. However, these formations did have certain vulnerabilities. If, for instance, the phalanx was attacked before full deployment or if the formation was disrupted by uneven terrain, the results could be disastrous. These factors account for the Roman victories at Cynoscephalae (197 B.C.) and Pydna (168 B.C.).

10. A point of consternation for Demosthenes (see *Third Philippic* 47–50).

11. At the rebellion's outbreak, Alexander was well north fighting the Illyrians. In 13 days he moved his entire force 240 miles south to confront the malcontents.

12. Philip was aided in these matters by the discovery of rich silver and gold deposits at Mount Pangaeum in Thrace.

13. J.F.C. Fuller suggests there are seven fundamentals of great generalship, including speed, surprise, maximum application of force, consolidation of victory, and so forth. In his opinion, Alexander possessed them all.

14. Arrian (3.8) reports that Darius' army at Gaugamela stood at 1,000,000 infantry and 40,000 cavalry. These figures must be taken as "conventional." Alexander's force was approximately 50,000 men in total. His army was probably outnumbered at least 3 to 1.

15. See D.E. Engels, *Alexander the Great and the Logistics of the Macedonian Army*, 9.

16. Caesar did become personally involved in combat at the Sambre River (57 B.C.) and again at Alesia (52 B.C.), but only in response to extraordinary crises. As a rule, Roman commanders rarely bloodied their own swords.

17. There is much in the extant literature to suggest Alexander's exploits were heavily inspired by Homer. We are told that he slept with a copy of the *Iliad* under his pillow; that he cared little for the material spoils of war but was more concerned with "immortal renown"; that he carried the sacred armor of Troy with him into battle; and that he longed

to achieve impossible feats in an effort to exceed those who had come before (e.g., Cyrus, Semiramis, Heracles, and Dionysus).

18. At Susa alone Alexander is said to have procured 50,000 talents of silver (Arrian 3.16).

19. Regarding this issue, it may be appropriate to distinguish between primary objectives (military, economic, political) and ancillary outcomes (cultural transmission and fusion).

20. For example, the Romans glorified his military achievements, but they criticized what they saw as a growing tendency to abuse power (Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 13.28; Tacitus, *Annals* 2.73). Saint Augustine (*City of God* 4.4) condemned Alexander as little more than a glorified brigand, and Dante (*Inferno*, canto XII) assigned the Macedonian to the seventh circle of Hell among "tyrants who plunged their hands in blood and plundering." But in the Koran (sura 18: 83–98), Zulgarnain ("the two-horned one") is presented as a benign agent protecting humanity against the forces of Gog and Magog (chaos and destruction). Widely disparate interpretations have also appeared among modern scholars. W.W. Tarn has famously insisted that Alexander was a knight in shining cuirass; for I. Worthington, Alexander was a serial killer with an army at his disposal; in J.M. O'Brien's opinion, Alexander was the plaything of Dionysus (i.e., a dissipate alcoholic who drank himself to death); and, according to E. Badian, Alexander's kingship is fittingly analogized with the tyranny of Adolf Hitler. All of this suggests that when it comes to Alexander, Clio continues to suffer from multiple personality disorder.

21. The Indian term for "Greeks."

22. Alexander's father Philip had initiated this process of standardization.

23. The term "talent" is of Babylonian origin and refers to a weight measure of approximately 57 pounds. A silver talent is therefore 57 pounds of silver, or the equivalent of 6,000 drachmas.

24. The Septuagint was produced under Ptolemy Philadelphus (308–246 B.C.). His motivation was not to make the Torah available to non–Jews but rather to make the Pentateuch available to his Jewish subjects, who had become so Hellenized they could no longer read Hebrew.

25. Although the term "barbarian" was certainly used by the Greeks in a spirit of cultural condescension, it was not employed to indicate racially based inferiority (cf. Aristotle, *Politics* 1.6). A barbarian was a non–Greek speaker operating without the benefit of the cultural opportunities afforded by the city-state. Implicitly, this definition suggested that non–Hellenes who adopted the new tongue might avail themselves of Greek culture, thereby discontinuing their status as barbarians. This was precisely the pattern characteristic of the Hellenistic era.

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15

Epicurus (341–270 B.C.)

Physicist and Ethician

Epicurus was the last and most authoritative figure in a triumvirate of atomist philosophers dating from the mid–5th century B.C. To a considerable degree, Epicurus' thought relied upon the pioneering speculation of Leucippus and Democritus, though he stubbornly asserted complete originality in all intellectual matters.[1] Despite these assertions, the available sources clearly suggest a conceptual progression leading eventually to the systematic theories of Epicurus, which came to exercise an enormous influence in late antiquity and, as we shall see, in the modern era as well.

Historically, the ancient Greek atomists must be acknowledged as some of the most provocative and innovative thinkers in Western history. Not only did their ideas anticipate much of present-day atomic theory, they also seem to have recognized several of the fundamental premises of modern physics, including the principle of conservation of matter that states matter can be neither created nor destroyed.[2] In their own times, they were also responsible for a critical advance over the paradoxic logic of Eleatic Monism, which threatened to obstruct further advances in natural philosophy. Since the early 5th century, Parmenides and his disciples had declared the world to be a continuous, corporeal plenum devoid of diversity, motion, and change. They argued that all images to the contrary were in fact illusions. In response to this startling assertion, the atomists provided a most ingenuous refutation. First, they argued that all material objects were compounds of minute particles; second, they stated that these "atoms"[3] were in a constant state of motion. By advancing the former position, Epicurus and his colleagues met the challenge of Parmenides' ontology by demonstrating the possibility of pluralism in the phenomenal world. Specifically, atomism provided a means of accounting for the "One" and the "Many." Each individual atom was an ungenerated, imper-

ishable, homogeneous plenum (the one) but capable of combining into a myriad of distinct objects (the many).

The second proposition regarding atomic motion was equally revolutionary. The Eleatics had reasoned that motion and change were impossible because this would imply the existence of empty space, but empty space is "nothing" and "nothing" cannot exist. Accordingly, for Parmenides and his followers, motion, change, variety, birth, death, and so on were merely chimeric reports from the senses. In response, the atomists posited the existence of a noncorporeal reality (i.e., the void). They argued that the void was not an example of non–Being, as the Eleatics had claimed, but rather a special category of reality where physical bodies reside and move. It was by these means that the atomists helped defeat the counterintuitive worldview of Eleaticism.

Biographically, we know a fair amount about Epicurus. He was born in 341 B.C. on the island of Samos, where his Athenian parents had settled as cleruchs.[4] At age 14 he began his studies with a Platonist philosopher named Pamphilus and later worked with Nausiphanes, a disciple of Democritus. At age 18 he traveled to Athens to receive his ephebic training, a paramilitary preparation required of all Athenian citizens. Upon discharge of this two-year obligation, he joined his parents at Colophon, where they had gone as exiles when Athens ceded Samos to the Macedonians after the Lamian War. The next 10 years, for which few precise details are available, were spent in travel and study. At approximately age 30, Epicurus launched his own teaching career, first at Mytilene and then at Lampsacus. From the outset he seems to have cultivated a devoted group of followers that eventually included Metrodorus, Colotes (the victim of Plutarch's barbs), Polyaenus, Idomeneus, Leonteus, and others. In 306 B.C. he and several members of his inner circle returned to Athens, where he established the school that would make him famous — the Garden (Ho Kepos). Membership was open to all, including women (even hetaerae) and slaves. A frugal rule of life was followed by all, despite many denunciatory allegations of riotous living. In addition to a long teaching career, Epicurus was also a prolific scholar. Diogenes Laertius (10.26) claims he produced some three hundred scrolls during his lifetime, of which three letters, forty short aphorisms (kyriaidoxai), and a few fragments from his work *Peri Physeos* (On Nature) survive.

As a personality, the surviving sources speak glowingly of Epicurus' generosity, calm demeanor, and compassion toward others. These qualities, in conjunction with his philosophical gifts, explain the unstinting praise he received from his followers. In Cicero's day (1st century B.C.), we are told, Epicurus was often referred to as "liberator" or "savior," and Lucretius pro-

claimed him "the brightest star of all the Grecian race," ranking his utterances above those of the Delphian Apollo (see On the Nature of Things — proem to Book 3). His reputation was no doubt enhanced further by the graceful manner in which he accepted death. Reportedly, at age seventy he developed an ailment resulting in extreme discomfort, which he nevertheless bore with exemplary courage.

The atomists are justly famous for their natural philosophy, but, in Epicurus' case, the primary interest seems never to have been naturalism per se. Indeed, one might argue it is best to view his extensive analysis of the natural realm as merely a means to a higher and ultimate end — the enhancement of the human condition. Therefore, one should think of Epicurus as an ethician rather than as one of the physiologoi. He was convinced that any scientific investigation that failed to contribute meaningfully to the human good was not worth pursuing. Accordingly, Epicurus maintained that natural phenomena should be scrutinized not to indulge abstract curiosity but to secure a variety of fortifying practical insights, the foremost of which were the composure to face death with courage and fortitude; the ability to deflate the terrors proffered by religious teaching; and a capacity to maintain peace of mind in the face of life's many "inconveniences."[5] With these points in mind, we proceed to an assessment of Epicurean physics.

In the opinion of all the atomists, including Epicurus, the universe was birthless, deathless, and, in its foundational operations, immutable. In addition, the universe was boundless — lacking in any extreme point against which one could gauge or establish cosmic parameter. Moreover, in this infinite expanse our world enjoyed no special status. In truth, there were innumerable worlds throughout the universe. The one thing these myriad worlds all shared was their fundamental composition — each was exclusively composed of minute, indivisible, corporeal entities known as atoms. Along with the void through which they traveled, these atomic building blocks were the ontological substrate for everything we identify as "reality." Though infinite in number, all atoms share three properties — size, shape, and weight. According to Epicurus, secondary qualities such as colors and tastes were not intrinsic aspects of atoms but rather the product of specific atomic combinations. In addition, atoms are in a constant state of motion, both linear and vibratory. Even when atoms are tightly configured in solid masses such as stone, they never actually fuse but continue oscillating unceasingly.[6]

One of the more novel aspects of Epicurus' scheme involves the clinamen, or atomic swerve.[7] Unlike Democritus and Leucippus, who explained the formation of physical objects by way of whirling motion, Epicurus described a

universal downward flow of atoms, not unlike raindrops. At some point, purely by chance, one of these atoms veers off its normal path, setting in motion a chain reaction of atomic collisions. It is this random deviation that causes the clustering of atoms resulting in physical objects. Not surprisingly, Epicurus' critics found much to deride in this approach to cosmogony. Cicero, for example, saw the "swerve" as an anemic attempt at "First Cause" and went on to dismiss the entire theory as an "arbitrary fiction" and a "childish fancy" (1.6.19). Cicero's reproaches notwithstanding, the doctrine of the swerve allowed Epicurus to advance two key premises of his system. First, the world, while certainly mechanistic in many details, was not devoid of contingency, and it was specifically this element of chance that explained man's free will. Second, the randomness of atomic motion illustrated the non-teleological character of our world. Epicurus certainly did not deny there was an "order" to the universe. What he rejected was any idea that rational design or intention lay behind the mechanical operations of nature.

This last point raises the obvious issue of divine involvement in nature. Although he was a materialist and believed only atoms and the void existed, Epicurus was not an atheist. To modern minds, conditioned as we are to think of divinity in spiritual terms, materialism is the logic of the nonbeliever.[8] But Epicurus fully accepts divine presence. He stations the gods in interstitial zones amid innumerable worlds where a particularly rich flow of atoms continuously replenishes the "idols" cast off by their material bodies.[9] Unlike man, this process of renewal immunizes the gods against atomic dissolution — they live forever. In addition, the gods enjoy an existence entirely devoid of care and concern. Theirs is an unburdened felicity relating in great measure to a complete exemption from providential responsibility. Here Epicurus promotes a key premise of his philosophy: Our world is fundamentally unscripted. There is no efficient cause orchestrating cosmic events any more than there is a final end toward which all things aim. In no sense can it be said that mind orders matter or that humanity is obliged to follow the dictates of some universal purpose. In the absence of any divine agency or scheme, humanity is left to its own devices. Religious beseeching is, therefore, powerless to either forestall evils or secure blessings. For this reason, men must resign themselves to the reality that life is to be lived without hope of godly assistance — neither prayer nor sacrifice can enlist the services of heaven. At the same time, however, they should be comforted by the fact that divine detachment renders baseless the eschatological nightmares forecasted by religious authority.

As noted above, Epicurus' natural philosophy is chiefly a supportive logic for his primary interest — attainment of the good life. It is not surprising, therefore, that Epicurus uses his physics as a foundation for a variety of obser-

vations on the human condition (e.g. theory of knowledge, social theory, human mortality, etc.). On the subject of human cognition, Epicurus asserts an uncompromising perceptualist position. Specifically, he argues that the data we receive from the senses is unerringly valid and truthful. If, however, confusion does arise, the fault lies not with the perceptual process, which involves the physical impact of atoms upon our sense organs, but rather it rests with the errant judgments we formulate about that which we perceive. Similarly, if contradictory assessments emerge between perceiving agents, this does not signal substantive variation in the mechanisms of perception. Epicurus rejected the subjectivism advanced by Democritus, who claimed that "what is sweet to one is bitter to another." For Epicurus, epistemology involved phusis, not nomos; it was a matter of nature, not convention or opinion. In addition, Epicurus' vigorous reliance upon sensory data meant the horizons of human understanding were definitely limited. Despite the fact that our minds are capable of exotic conceptualization, legitimate professions of "truth" are ultimately limited to sensation. It is in this sense that Epicurus denies the possibility of noesis (i.e., of conceiving by reason alone). The testimony of the senses uniquely constitutes knowledge; the rest must be attributed to human manufacture.[10]

In terms of man's social existence, Epicurus believed the civic environment and the rules governing communal life were entirely a matter of compact. Society was not a natural institution, as Plato and Aristotle had argued, nor was there anything approximating a natural standard of right.[11] Communities were formed by men based on prudential calculation, not brotherhood. In effect, society was viewed by Epicurus as an aggregation of self-concerned individuals bound by prospects of mutual advantage.

It was advantage, too, that stood at the center of personal relationships. Epicurus places high value on friendship, but he does so based on the practical benefits derived thereof. Ultimately, the Epicurean sees friendship as a relation of amicable utility, a mechanism by which the perils of life are more effectually managed. Expediency was also the reason why Epicurus counseled against the entanglements of romantic love. Wise men seek imperturbability in life, and few things, according to Epicurus, are more disruptive of serenity than the violent passions of love.[12] Idle desires such as these must be avoided by all those who would secure the good life.

The human soul was another prime area of concern for Epicurus. In his view, the atoms constituting the soul were qualitatively distinct from those comprising the body. Soul particles were the finest and most mobile of all atoms. Some of these special atoms were dispersed throughout the human body and accounted for physical motion and sensation. Other soul atoms, of

a particularly pure variety, remained distinct from and unblended with bodily atoms. They tended to concentrate in the chest region and produced the cognitive and psychological affects we associate with the term, "mind,"—thought, recollection, emotion, will, and so forth. Accordingly, the soul was properly identified as the animating force and the directive element of humankind. Despite all this, however, no amalgamation of atoms resulted in enduring unity. Only individual atoms are immune to disintegration, not the composite entities they comprised. Simply, Epicurus believed both soma and psyche were subject to atomic dissolution, or "death." But as bitter as the realities of human finitude may be, Epicurus counseled his followers to meet them with undaunted confidence. The torments and agonies commonly associated with death and dying are completely inconsistent with the logic of atomism. Death is merely the natural process by which a given period of atomic ligature concludes and should, therefore, be met with a kind of equable insouciance. "Accustom thyself," Epicurus advised, "to believe that death is nothing to us, for good and evil imply sentience, and death is the privation of all sentience.." (Diogenes Laertius 10.124). This proposition, in conjunction with Epicurus' assurance of divine disinterest, means the fear of death and the fear of torment after death are irrational illusions.

However remarkable his assessments of atomic phenomena, no facet of Epicurus' thought is more vital to Epicurean philosophy than the doctrine of pleasure. At the same time, nothing he advanced proved more controversial or more subject to misunderstanding. In prescribing "pleasure" as the ultimate object of human endeavor and insisting that ethical hedonism was the only correct means of charting one's course in life, Epicurus invited severe moral stricture from a variety of philosophical opponents.[13] In great measure, these attacks were facilitated by the negative ethical implication of the term itself. Hēdonē was in some sense a "loaded" word in antiquity. Typically, the term did not convey more ethically neutral concepts such as "joy" or "happiness" but routinely indicated sensual indulgence. As such, the word bore an unequivocally pejorative connotation. And thus, by identifying pleasure as the ultimate end of life, Epicurus placed himself and his school under a moral cloud. It allowed Cicero to condemn Epicureanism as "a doctrine in the last degree unworthy of the dignity of man" (1.7.23), just as it permitted Plutarch to indict the Epicureans as ministers of the flesh (A Pleasant Life Impossible 1107c). But how valid were these censures? Was Epicurus a *patronus voluptatis*, as his critics alleged?

The many shafts aimed at Epicurus and his disciples were fully predictable given the moral idiom of Hellenic philosophy. From the time of Socrates, if not earlier, the Greeks had made a powerful moral distinction between body

and soul. Those dedicating themselves to the latter (i.e., to the life of spiritual and mental cultivation) were morally superior to those who allowed the ways of the flesh to determine their course in life. Pleasure-seekers were generally understood as morally degenerate, as depraved underlings of the body. Public opinion tended to strongly identify Epicureanism in these terms. In truth, however, neither the stereotypes of the average person nor the tendentious assaults of philosophical opponents accurately portrayed the subtleties of Epicurean hedonism. Epicureanism was not a renascent form of Cyrenaicism, nor Epicurus a reborn Aristippus. The path prescribed by the Garden did not lead from kitchen to tavern and then to brothel, as most people believed. On the contrary, Epicurus' notion of pleasure was meticulously qualified and at no time advocated debauchery. Every creature, including man, from the moment of its birth seeks pleasure as the prime good and recoils from pain as the chief evil. This, according to Epicurus, was the unbiased and universal verdict of nature. At the same time, however, Epicurus was quick to acknowledge that not all pleasures were worthy of human desire any more than all pains were fittingly avoided. On occasion, it might be wise to accept pains that lead to greater pleasures and to reject pleasures that lead to greater pains. In short, the proper hedonist weighs and sifts his opportunities carefully. He does not simply drink life to the lees.

In addition, Epicurus insisted that not all human desires were worthy of indulgence. Some desires were "natural and necessary," such as the consumption of food and drink. Others were classified as "natural and unnecessary," such as sexual activity. Still others were designated by Epicurus as "neither natural nor necessary." This third category was the product of human imagination and as such knew no boundary or limit. Herein lie the "vanities" that bring disorder and chaos to human affairs (power, glory, wealth and status). Epicurus' advice was to content oneself primarily with the simple pleasures of the first category and to avoid the extravagances of category three.

It is also untrue that Epicurus made no provision in his system for traditional moral virtues such as wisdom, temperance, justice, and so forth. In his view, these qualities were not desirable in themselves; only pleasure should be pursued as an intrinsic good. They were, however, of critical instrumental worth in attaining the good life: "no one can live pleasantly without living wisely, honorably, and justly, and no one wisely, honorably, and justly without living pleasantly" (Cicero 1.18.57). The prudent and just man was, therefore, in the best possible position to assay what is genuinely pleasurable and to avoid illusory alternatives.

What, then, was the most blessed life according to Epicurus? The answer, as should now be clear, has little to do with the delicacies of a finely arrayed

table, but is instead revealed by a battery of cognate terms employed by Epicurus and his followers, such as euthymia (contentment), ataraxia (freedom from disturbance), and athambia (imperturbability). These are the mental states of those who have truly secured bliss and are related to yet another important qualification urged by Epicurus upon all those seeking the path of true happiness. The Epicureans divided pleasures into two broad categories: kinetic and katastemic. Pleasures of the first variety involve external stimuli of some sort. These pleasures (e.g. the consumption of choice foods) can be very intense, but they are typically of short duration and are often attended by a series of correlative pains. They represent, therefore, impure forms of pleasure. In contrast, katastemic pleasures involve a sense of ease associated with release from pain (e.g., no longer feeling hunger). Unlike the more dynamic kinetic pleasures, katastemic hedonism is stable and subject to indefinite prolongation. An ample supply of katastemic satisfaction in conjunction with a disciplined suppression of unnatural desires are fundamental necessities of the good life, and when these assets are combined with the consolatory insights bestowed by natural philosophy, the result is an individual best suited for enjoying bodily health and mental tranquility.[14]

In speaking of Epicureanism's influence, Cicero, who was by no means a friendly voice, was forced to acknowledge Epicurus' immense impact upon Greeks, Romans, and barbarians alike. Knowledge of Epicurean doctrine was, for example, well known among the Hebrews, as the content of the Book of Ecclesiastes demonstrates. Indeed, the Jews came to employ the term epikoros as a kind of generic designation for all manner of religious infidelity. We know, too, that Philo Judaeus had a thorough and accurate grasp of Epicurean teaching and that St. Paul encountered opposition from Epicureans during his mission to Athens (Acts 17:18). By the 5th century A.D., however, much of Epicureanism was moribund, or at least so it seemed to St. Augustine, who jubilantly declared that the school's ashes were so cold that not a single spark could be struck from them (Epist. 118.12). Given Epicureanism's positions on the soul, life after death, and the absence of efficient cause, one can understand the Bishop of Hippo's enthusiastic call for black crepe and knell. In truth, however, reports of Epicureanism's demise were exaggerated and premature. In fact, the fruits of this Garden were to prove more resilient than anyone could have imagined.

During the medieval period, Epicureanism suffered the same neglectful indignities experienced by many of the other ancient schools. By the early 15th century, however, the embers of Epicureanism began to glow once again. Several Latin authors who remained influential in the literary culture of

medieval Europe had been well disposed toward Epicurean philosophy. Perhaps the most significant individual in this regard was Seneca, who, despite strong Stoic predilections, rejected the moral aspersions traditionally leveled against Epicurus, insisting instead that his hedonism was in truth sobria and siccia (i.e., sober and dry).[15] Sentiments such as these no doubt encouraged Italian humanists such as Lorenzo Valla to invoke an Epicurean-inspired theory of pleasure in their efforts to overturn the old virtue ethics of Aristotle and the Stoics.

Epicureanism also played a substantial role in the new mechanico-mathematical conception of the world that emerged in the 16th and 17th centuries. It was during this period that thinkers such as Bacon, Bruno, Galileo, and others mounted their revolt against the dogmatic metaphysics of antiquity. In his *Novum Organon* (#63 and #71) and again in *Advancement of Learning* (2.7), Bacon applauded the ancient atomists as true scientists, while simultaneously censuring Aristotle as a corrupter of natural philosophy. Endorsements were also forthcoming from noted physicist Robert Boyle, who spoke of "that great and ancient sect of philosophers, the atomists."[16] Epicureanism also seems to have had some influence upon the thought of Isaac Newton,[17] as it did on some portion of John Dalton's work, which, in essence, provided a qualitative demonstration of ancient atomism's central premise regarding the atomic constitution of matter.

It is clear, then, that by the 17th century the restoration of Epicureanism that began with the Italian humanists had gained considerable momentum, particularly in the natural sciences. In the end, many names would appear on the roster of those contributing to the Epicurean revival, but pride of place must ultimately be assigned the French philosopher and scientist Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655). Beyond any other advocate of ancient materialism, it was Gassendi, directly or indirectly, who was most responsible for disseminating Epicureanism to the scientific and philosophical communities of Europe. Yet Gassendi presented a portrait of the Garden that was uniquely his own and, in particular, designed to fit with Christian dogma. No longer were atoms the eternal, infinite, and random substratum of material existence. Gassendi reinstated efficient cause in the universe; God had created atoms and did so in numbers specific to his cosmogonic objectives. In addition, Gassendi's Christian rehabilitation of Epicurus was quick to dispense with unordered, mechanical devices such as the clinamen. Atomic activity was endowed by the Creator with purpose and meaning indicative of providential purpose.[18]

Perhaps the most far-reaching effect of the reborn Epicureanism was the impact it had upon the new political theory of 17th-century England, partic-

ularly the seminal ideas of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Even prior to the political turmoil leading to his self-imposed exile,[19] Hobbes had made several trips to the continent, where he familiarized himself with the revivified thought of Epicurus. Locke also spent an extended period of time in France (1675–1679) ,where he established relations with various Gassendists, including Francois Bernier. Both men were powerfully influenced by their exposure to neo–Epicureanism, particularly with regard to their understanding of the human good and the means of attaining it. Just as Epicurus had rejected any notion of securing transcendental virtues, Hobbes and Locke believed the proper activity of humanity had more to do with securing the material contentments of life than seeking eternal essences. Here, Epicurean influence is easily traced to the extent that Hobbes and Locke defined "contentments" in decidedly hedonistic terms. Hobbes, for example, claimed that all men sought "commodious living" (Lev. 13.63) and that our assessments of good and evil were ultimately reducible to experiences of pleasure and pain (Lev. 6.25 and De Cive 1.2).[20] Locke echoed these same points in his Essay Concerning Human Understanding (20), where he reasoned that the various passions responsible for so much of human conduct — love, hate, hope, fear, envy, and so on — all had pleasure and pain as their root source.

Along with their hedonistic psychologies, Hobbes and Locke additionally promoted an apolitical view of mankind. Epicurus had rejected the doctrine of natural sociability advocated by thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle. In his opinion, human community was a system of synthetic affiliations engendered by self-regarding calculation. These ideas eventually became a mainstay in the contractualist logic of modern political thought. For Hobbes and Locke, society was not a reflection of some deep-seated social instinct. In De Cive (1.1–2), Hobbes asserts at the outset that society "exists for the sake of either advantage or glory" and is completely unrelated to man's alleged status as a political animal. For Locke, too, the motives underlying the formation of commonwealths had little to do with fraternal instinct. The true intention rested, instead, in an effort to mutually preserve the life, liberty and estates of those assenting to the contract (Second Treatise 123).[21]

The manner in which Hobbes and Locke viewed the function of the state reveals yet another affinity between Epicureanism and modern political thought. According to Epicurus, political regimes are not to be understood as vehicles for the rational, moral, and social perfection of humankind. Rather than pursue some abstract notion of human excellence, the proper activity of politics, for Epicurus, is the satisfaction of man's hedonistic ambitions. In other words, the state is an engine for the attainment of private desires, and it is precisely this joining of politics with the universal quest for pleasure that

provided the foundational logic for Hobbes' and Locke's political hedonism. As Hobbes observed, the duty of rulers does not lie in producing subjects committed to noble things but in furnishing citizens with an abundant supply of goods "conducive to delectation."[22] In the same spirit, Locke makes clear his belief that the contract is a major advance over the state of nature because it allows men to pursue a life of pleasure (i.e., unlimited appropriation of property), and to do so in an atmosphere of peace and security.[23] Indeed, for Locke, material acquisition is quite literally the central tenet of his political instruction and a pivotal element in his constitutional theory.

The Epicurean tradition and the political hedonism it inspired in the 17th century has had a profound effect upon modern political and moral doctrine. In fact, much of the way in which we approach life today — our values, our social theories, our civic recipes — are undeniably related to the Epicurean legacy. This is not to suggest that Epicurus' ideas were not heavily mediated over the course of more than 2,000 years. In the end, every era applies its own refractive lens to the past, selectively focusing on what it deems worthy of retention. Epicureanism was by no means immune to such winnowing. Many of the school's richly nuanced and cautiously qualified distinctions were minimized or significantly modified by modernity. Above all, we have "materialized" our notions of pleasure in a manner that ignores the Garden's caution that genuine happiness can never be attained in the absence of wisdom, honor, and justice. Still, when we consider our contemporary imagery of the good life, with its sanctified views of private possession, its sybaritic encouragements, and its isolative individualism, one is forced to acknowledge how much of bourgeois civilization mirrors, *mutatis mutandis*, a worldview redolent of Epicurus. Yet, despite the important role Epicurus played in shaping our world, he remains one of the most unsung figures on our roster of Western architects. Fortunately, his achievements have not gone entirely unnoticed. In assessing Epicureanism and the political hedonism it inspired, Leo Strauss summarized the movement in these terms: "a doctrine which has revolutionized human life everywhere on a scale never yet approached by any other teaching" (Natural Right 169).

Notes

1. Epicurus' critics often attacked him on the issue of originality — for example, Cicero in *De Finibus* (1.6) and Plutarch in "Reply to Colotes" (1108f). Both authors claim his views were derived from the laughing philosopher, Democritus.

2. In this regard, the atomists may have been anticipated by Empedocles (see fragment 12 in H. Diels, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, trans. K. Freeman [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957]).

3. In Greek, the word "atom" means "uncuttable."

4. The term cleruch refers to a special category of Greek colonists who retained their original citizenship despite being part of a new community (see chapter 8n.15).

5. See the "Letter to Pythocles" in Diogenes Laertius (10.85) and Cicero's *De Finibus* (1.19.64).

6. A good summary of Epicurus' physics can be found in Diogenes Laertius 10.39–66 (letter to Herodotus).

7. See Lucretius, Book 2.216–93.

8. For the locus classicus of this logic, one should consult Plato's *Laws*, Book 10.

9. It is these perceptible "idols" composed of uniquely fine atoms that impact the human mind, creating a direct mental sensation and thus confirming divine existence.

10. In assessing human cognition, Epicurus is faced with the troublesome issue of how a mechanical aggregation of simple bodies (atoms) can account for complex mental and spiritual functions. He attempts to remedy this problem by arguing that atomic combinations produce organismic unities different in kind from their component elements—a view some found unsatisfactory (see Plutarch, "Reply to Colotes" IIIId).

11. See the Sovran Maxims (32, 33, 34, and 36) in Diogenes Laertius 10.150–52).

12. It is this same prospect of vexation that leads Epicurus to advise against entering public life. The wise man opts for civic quietism and lives a life "unnoticed."

13. Perhaps the most spirited antagonists challenging the Epicureans were the Stoics.

14. Epicurus also designates such an individual as the model wise man—a person who would be happy even on the rack (Diogenes Laertius 10.118).

15. The key works by Seneca were *De Vita Beata* (A.D. 58) and the *Epistulae Morales* (A.D. 63–65).

16. See Boyle's *A Free Inquiry into the Vulgarly Received Notion of Nature*, ed. E.B. Davis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 90. However, Boyle was strongly critical of the materialists' tendency to render God superfluous.

17. See for example Newton's *Opticks*, where Sir Isaac is heard to say, "It seems probable to me, that God in the beginning form'd matter in solid, massy, hard impenetrable, moveable particles" (Bk. 3, Query 31).

18. As Gassendi notes, "Nothing was created without the deliberation and providence of God, and if atoms were the instrument used, they coalesced into the magnificent work of the universe not by a chance occurrence, but according to divine disposition" (*Physics* 408).

19. Hobbes was part of a group of royalist émigrés who fled England during the revolution. Known as the New Castle Circle, members included William and Charles Cavendish, John Pell, and Walter Warner.

20. There is, however, an important disjuncture between Epicurus and Hobbes concerning human felicity. For the former, the most desirable state was one of mental repose or spiritual contentment. But Hobbes rejects any notion of finis ultimus or summum bonum. In his view, the human condition involves a perpetual stream of desires, making quiescence of any kind impossible (*Lev.* 11.47).

21. Locke's omnibus term for these three objects of intended preservation is "property." For a more limited usage of the term, see *Second Treatise* 138–39.

22. See *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, 2:13.4.

23. See Locke, *Second Treatise*, chapter 9. See also F. Vaughan (1982), chapter 3, and L. Strauss (1953), chapter 5.

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16

Zeno (335–263 B.C.)

Stoic Sage

For most people, the word "Stoicism"[1] has about as much meaning as "Platonism" or "Aristotelianism." They may have heard the word, but they remain completely oblivious to the details of the school's teachings. Thus, if we speak of Stoic concepts such as an all-pervasive reason (*kenos logos*) or an all-encompassing universal city (*cosmopolis*) or the periodic incineration of the world by a cosmic fire (*ekpyrosis*), we are speaking in terms that are not only alien but also fundamentally indecipherable to the vast majority of individuals. Still, every time we take pride in our own capacity to remain self-possessed in response to grave crisis or when we feel admiration for those who remain imperturbable in the face of some ill fortune, we are showing approval of a "stoic" response. More precisely, we are reacting to a central tenet of Stoic philosophy known as *apatheia*, a kind of spiritual resignation, that constitutes much of this philosophy's prescription for the life worth living. In a sense, then, we are all unwitting Stoics to the extent that we seek the strategies that will provide refuge against life's myriad storms. In the final analysis, Stoicism is to be seen as nothing less than a comprehensive attempt at furnishing this shelter — the need for which, of course, remains timeless, given the human condition.

We can gauge the effectiveness of Stoic philosophy in these matters by two indices. First, there is the school's remarkable stamina. Stoicism remained a potent intellectual and spiritual force in Western culture for more than five centuries (301 B.C.–A.D. 270). The reason for this impressive persistence is clearly tied to the Stoic message. Not only did the Stoic system ultimately address several of the great existential questions, it also offered a philosophy ideally suited to the spirit of the age. The Hellenistic era represented a very different cultural climate from the "Golden Age." Much of the earlier exu-

berance and buoyant expectation had been spent. Men were now much less interested in cultivating knowledge for its own sake. Instead, philosophy was increasingly called upon to provide solace in a world that had become impersonal and alienating. Now the philosophic enterprise focused upon practical tools that might result in the happiness, if not the "salvation," of the individual. In this regard, Stoicism was well positioned to meet the demands of a new spiritual yearning. Simply put, it offered the right message at the right time.

The second measure of Stoicism's success is more difficult to calculate, given that tracing the origins of deeply ingrained cultural sentiments is an inherently difficult task. Nevertheless, in areas such as spirituality, legal theory and even certain aspects of Western economic doctrine, Stoic philosophy has bequeathed a powerful and lasting legacy — a premise well summarized by J. Lorimer, who states, "It [Stoicism] moulded human institutions and affected human destiny to a greater extent than all the other philosophical systems either of ancient or modern times."[2]

There is a good deal of biographical information available for Zeno, the founder of Stoicism. He was born on the island of Cyprus in the Greek city of Citium. In all probability, Zeno was a Phoenician by birth but his philosophic evolution reveals a process of thorough Hellenization. Tradition has it that Zeno landed in Athens in about 313 B.C. as a result of a shipwreck. Diogenes Laertius (7.1.2) reports that upon reaching the Piraeus Zeno wandered into a bookshop, where he came across a copy of Xenophon's *Memorabilia*. Inspired by the author's portrait of Socrates, he asked the proprietor where he might find such men, at which point the shop owner pointed to Crates, who just happened to be passing by at that moment.

This charming, though no doubt apocryphal account, hints at several salient points relating to Stoicism's developmental history. First, the immediate wellspring for much of Zeno's early thought is traceable to Cynic foundations (see below). Crates of Thebes, the disciple of the notorious Cynic iconoclast Diogenes of Sinope,[3] was one of Zeno's earliest mentors and is universally credited with having exercised a profound and enduring influence upon his disciple's ethical theory.[4] In addition, the original Socratic inspiration suggested by Diogenes Laertius reflects Socrates' seminal role in virtually all Hellenistic philosophy. In fact, almost all roads lead back to the Athenian gadfly — Cynic, Cyrenaic, Megarian, Skeptic, and Stoic alike.

After his time with Crates, Zeno came under the influence of Stilpo and the Megarian school. From these thinkers, Zeno obtained two important components of his philosophic repertoire. First, it was Stilpo who imparted the

tools of rational debate, an essential skill given the fiercely competitive environment between and among the various schools. Second, the Megarians are credited with having lent the Stoics certain key elements of their epistemology. Specifically, the Stoic emphasis on varying degrees of certainty in perceptual knowledge seems to have been of Megarian provenance.[5]

Our sources also tell us Zeno began his own extensive teaching career in about 300 B.C., during which time he is said to have produced an impressive roster of distinguished disciples, including Cleanthes, the son of Phanias (who succeeded Zeno as scholarch), Ariston son of Miltiades, Persaeus son of Demetrius, Herillus of Carthage, Athenodorus of Soli, and Posidonius of Alexandria.[6] In addition to his instructional prowess, Zeno also enjoyed a reputation among the Athenians as a man of immense moral integrity, so much so that his self-restraint became proverbial.[7] These achievements earned him a variety of honors in his adopted city. He was, for example, entrusted with the keys to the city's gates. He was also awarded a golden crown and a bronze statue in acknowledgment of his contributions to the city's welfare.

The austere lifestyle Zeno purportedly led — he is said to have lived mostly on water and raw foods — may have contributed to his extraordinary longevity. The circumstances surrounding his demise, "colorful" as they are, are worth reporting. According to Diogenes Laertius (7.28), Zeno was leaving his school when he tripped and fell, breaking a toe. Striking the ground with his fist, he is said to have quoted a line from the lyric poet Timotheus' *Niobe*: "I come, I come, why dost thou call for me?" At which point, he took his own life by holding his breath. The Athenians marked his passing by voting him a tomb at the Ceramicus funded at public expense.

Philosophical Antecedents

A strong case can be made for the idea that Stoicism advances little that is original, that it is a highly eclectic school whose genius lies not in invention but rather in skillful aggregation. Clearly, the ripened fruit of Stoicism reflects a diverse range of philosophic components, including Heraclitean, Socratic, Cynic, Platonic, and Aristotelian elements. This diversity should not suggest, however, that Stoicism was simply a patchwork of earlier ideas cleverly stitched together by Zeno and his followers. Rather, in Stoicism we have a clear example of the integrated whole equaling more than the sum of its parts. Although many of the constituent features found in Stoicism were derived from earlier schools and thinkers, the final product was a masterful synthesis that not only addressed the spiritual needs of the age but also did so effectively for five hundred years. This achievement, and its lasting cultural effects, could never have

been registered by a mere miscellany of borrowed notions. Stoicism became the *tour de force* that it did because it succeeded in forging a unified and systematic meditation on the human condition that was, in fact, unique.

One approach in tracing various strands of Stoic philosophy is to divide the school into its three historical units — early, middle, and late. The early Stoa is typically dated from the end of the 4th century to the 2nd century B.C., a period that, of course, includes the founding efforts of Zeno. As indicated in Zeno's biographical sketch, the ultimate source for much of Stoic imagery and teaching is the Socratic paradigm. In the long term, Socrates became the idealized illustration of the *sophos*, or wise man, for the Stoics as well as many others. But even in his own day — that is, before his canonization — Socrates' charismatic qualities were apparently a powerful source of inspiration for the young men who flocked to his side. Among these was Antisthenes, a former student of the sophist Gorgias and the man generally credited as the founder of the Cynic movement. Most famously, Antisthenes was noted for his categorical rejection of pleasure: "I would rather be mad than feel physical pleasure." As an alternative to gross hedonism, Antisthenes insisted nothing was really good but virtue and nothing truly evil but vice. This extraordinary emphasis on morality also led Antisthenes and his followers to minimize the importance of learned theorizing. Any speculation that did not contribute directly to moral edification was dismissed as vain and otiose.[8] For Antisthenes, then, virtue was the self-sufficient end of life, and, once obtained, it became the imperishable possession of the beneficiary.

Perhaps the most noted, and certainly the most colorful, figure of the Cynic circle was Diogenes, a man who assailed societal orthodoxy with shocking ferocity. As an advocate of the simple life, he championed the ways of "natural" or primitive man, including the rejection of material possessions, a renunciation of specific sociopolitical loyalties, and advocacy of the public performance of all natural functions. Heterodoxies such as these would, according to Cynic reasoning, yield important benefits in terms of freedom, self-sufficiency, and happiness. In addition, the ancient record suggests Diogenes espoused notions of an all-embracing humanity and, more specifically, the idea of *cosmopolis* that would figure so prominently in Stoic thought. Diogenes Laertius (6.63) reports that when the Cynic master was asked where he came from, he would respond, "I am a citizen of the world."[9]

The last link in the Socratic-Cynic chain leading directly to Zeno was Crates of Thebes, a devoted follower of Diogenes. In addition to adopting many of the extreme heterodoxies advanced by his master,[10] Crates became famous in his own right for a great cosmopolitan gesture. Having been born of an illustrious family, it is said that he converted his entire estate into cash

(200 talents) and bequeathed the full sum to his fellow citizens. In addition to succoring the Thebans, Crates was also noted for his attempts at conflict resolution. Apparently his efforts in this regard were rather successful, so much so that he came to be called "door opener" and "good spirit."

Among the Cynics, then, we can identify many of the key elements that would inform and inspire the thinking of Zeno. In particular, we can trace the rudiments of Stoicism's ethical vehemence, the goals of autonomy and self-sufficiency, the superiority of "nature" over parochial convention, and a new ecumenical understanding of the human community.[11] Based on these critical contributions, one must conclude that the Cynics merit pride of place in supplying the preamble to early Stoicism. There is, however, one additional component in the Porch's preliminary development that was not obtained from the likes of Diogenes and Crates. It involves Stoicism's natural philosophy, which was derived, in great measure, from the Presocratic philosopher Heraclitus. Two of the more prominent features of the Heraclitean legacy are a notorious obscurity of language not unlike the oracular tones of Delphi[12] and a *logos* doctrine that would leave a deep and lasting impression on the history of Western thought. The term *logos* is exceptionally difficult and fully reflects the linguistic complexities of ancient Greek. We see this clearly in Heraclitus' usage, where the term is variously employed to indicate reason, his own discourse, and language in general. But Heraclitus also uses the word to indicate a rule of nature by which all things were to be explained. It is in this context that Heraclitus speaks of an eternal fire, illustrating both the progenitive and ordering capacities of *logos*.[13] These ideas, with a variety of adjustments, would eventually serve as the central premises for much of Stoic physics (see below).[14]

The next stage in the history of Stoicism involves the so-called Middle Stoa, typically dated from the second century before Christ. The two dominant figures of this period were Panaetius of Rhodes and his disciple Poseidonius of Apamaea. Panaetius moved to Rome in the 140s and became an important member of the scholarly entourage surrounding Scipio Aemilianus.[15] Although Panaetius and Poseidonius remained loyal to many of the fundamental tenets of Stoicism, they were not averse to certain innovations, nor were they unwilling to consider the merits of earlier philosophical traditions. In particular, it was the Middle Stoa that initiated the incorporation of various Platonic elements into the Stoic worldview. As a result of this process, traditional Stoic monism began to take on certain dualistic features suggestive of Platonism. Increasingly, the cosmos was understood in terms of a supralunar and infralunar division — the former being, in some sense, imperishable , while the latter was disintegrative and transient. The unifying bond

between these two realms was humanity, which combined both the corporeal and the spiritual facets of each domain. In advancing these views, Stoicism (and particularly Poseidonius) resurrected the body/soul dualism advanced by Plato. Concurrently, Poseidonius also demeaned the flesh as an impediment to spiritual progress, argued for the existence of "daemons" (intermediary beings between man and God),[16] and supported the notion of the soul's pre-existence[17]—all positions redolent of Platonic anthropology.

The culminating chapter in Stoicism's long history was written by a distinctively Roman version of the school dating from the late first and early second centuries A.D. An important transitional figure linking the middle and later forms of Stoicism was Cicero, a man well versed in virtually all of the major philosophical schools of his day, including the Porch.[18] The Roman face of Stoicism received its unique contours from three towering figures: Seneca, a philosopher, poet, and tutor/advisor to the emperor

Nero[19]; Epictetus,[20] a former slave who became a noted thinker and teacher; and the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius, who ruled from A.D. 161 to 180. Unlike the earlier variants of Stoicism, the Roman Porch was concerned far more with practical than with theoretical matters. We discover, for example, very little new speculation on subjects such as theory of knowledge or cosmology among these thinkers. Instead, we encounter advice and admonition on such subjects as maintaining inner tranquility, the duties of proper citizenship, and the obligations owed one's fellow man. With the passing of the Roman Porch, Stoicism's identifiable status as a "school" draws to a close. Its many influences, however, in areas as diverse as ethics, law, religion, and social theory remain a vibrant part of ancient Greece's contribution to Western culture.

The Stoic World Picture

There is no debating the fact that the chief concern of Stoic philosophy was human conduct. In the final analysis, every facet of the school's many inquiries was inevitably dedicated to clarifying and reinforcing the moral imperatives by which men were to live their lives. Given this ethical priority, it might seem that Stoic cosmological interests were a theoretical deviation, a scholarly digression far from the moral path. In truth, however, Stoic natural philosophy was an indispensable ingredient in the Porch's moral scheme. Indeed, devoid of its grounding in physics, much of Stoic moral teaching would have lacked both foundation and authority. The reason for this stems from one of Stoicism's core propositions *viz.*, the virtuous life is not the product of human artifice. According to Stoicism, men do not invent morality—they

discover it, because nature itself is the definitive repository for all that is good, just, and lawful in the world.

How did the Stoics arrive at this premise? In what sense were they able to speak of nature itself as the vital source of a universal moral blueprint? The answer to these and all related questions is derived from Stoic cosmogony. Zeno and his followers offered a view of the world that might be termed "monistic materialism." All that we perceive is to be understood in corporeal terms. Variations in physical form are the result of a process involving rarefaction and condensation. The four foundational elements (fire, air, water, earth) are the material manifestations of this process.[21] But while the Stoics argue that all is matter,[22] they do so in a way that sharply distinguishes them from their Epicurean rivals. Of and in itself, matter is passive, but the matter comprising our world is neither inactive nor inert because a vitalizing spiritual force (*logos spermatikos*) has interpenetrated all existence. In other words, Stoicism advances a kind of hylozoism that claims an inseparable blending (*krasis*) of divine and material components.[23] As a result, the content, organization, and activity of the world is not to be understood as some stochastic collage. Rather, the world is an intelligent, beautiful, orderly realm — a living rational organism solicitous of its many constituent units.[24]

This immanent divinity also pervades humanity. Indeed, its presence in man allows us to assign him a privileged position within the grand design. He is, as Epictetus suggested, "a fragment of God" (*Discourses* 2.8.11),[25] and as such he is uniquely capable of decoding the moral mandates of the universe — the microcosm can decipher the macrocosm. It is in this sense that we can speak of morality preceding the innovative energies of man. Nature itself is the great moral preceptor, the normative measure by which all the world is governed.

Implicitly, Stoic physics contains a prescription for the good life. Our task as rational beings does not lie in ethical ingenuity. Instead, we must play the part assigned us by God;[26] that is to say, we must live in accordance with nature. This premise can also be understood in teleological terms. The end that all men seek is happiness, but true happiness is unattainable without virtue. An ethical existence is, therefore, the supreme imperative in human affairs; it alone can supply us with the quality of life that ensures human felicity. In this regard, nature has proven extraordinarily generous by offering us an infallible guideline — the Order of Being. Divine purposes are always benign, according to the Stoics, so by harmonizing our lives with the larger rhythm and cadence of the world (*homologia*), we receive that which is truly beneficial, desirable, and just.[27] In short, a moral life is not merely a duty.

For the Stoics, it was a kind of worship that affirmed the unity of human and divine reason, yielding thereby a worthwhile existence.

These notions of the morally attained "good life" inevitably bring us to a consideration of the Stoic wise man. Although such individuals are acknowledged as extremely uncommon,[28] they nevertheless represent the Porch's ideal standard for the life properly lived. Above all, they are described as moral exemplars who strictly abide by the mandates of right reason as set down by nature. Specifically, they possess the complete range of moral assets, including wisdom, justice, courage, and temperance, and they enjoy these virtues in plenitude. For the Stoics, morality was never conceived as a matter of degree. An individual was either comprehensively moral or he was not.[29] For the few capable of attaining this status, the reward was a kind of beatitude in which the human soul attained a spiritual state approximating the supreme, rational disposition of God. The truly wise manifested their status in a variety of ways, but, above all, what distinguished their lives qualitatively from the rest of humanity were spiritual attitudes that not only mirrored the larger logic of the universe but also bestowed the equivalent of divine bliss.

In what sense can it be said that the wise participate in a joy comparable to that of God? For one thing, the Stoics consistently maintained that life is what we make of it. The substance of a wise man's existence was superior to all others because his life was unburdened by the misjudgments that confuse and falsify human affairs. In other words, much of the pain and suffering people experience in life is not an inherent feature of the human condition. Although it may seem at times that life has conspired against us, that the world wills our grief, the wise man understands such reasoning to be untrue. Given their belief in the imminent presence of a rational divinity, the Stoics consistently denied anything suggestive of a malignant ontology. The ostensive misfortunes that intrude upon our lives are best seen as self-inflicted wounds traceable to errant assessment. This is the point made by Seneca (*Epistle* 78.14) when he notes, "A man is as wretched as he has convinced himself he is," an idea seconded by Epictetus (*Enchiridion* 5),[30] who claimed, "It is not the things themselves that disturb people but their judgments about those things." Armed with these dispositional assets, the wise man navigates life guided by a sense of unshakeable composure. Unlike most individuals, his spiritual outlook immunizes him against the fears, disruptions, and torments that afflict others.

The wise man is also described as possessing an acute sense of priority. Whereas the vast majority of men are routinely blinded by dubious societal standards, the wise see things clear and whole. In particular, they appreciate the fact that what most people covet in life are, at best, things that should be

viewed with *adiaphoria* (i.e., indifference). When considering this question, Zeno referred to a long list of conventional "blessings" with which we should not be overly concerned, including glory, riches, health, pleasure, and even life itself. The same attitude was expressed by the emperor Marcus Aurelius (*Meditations* 6.13) in a notable passage in which he admonishes himself against such vainglory of royalty as the purple-edged robe, which is, after all, nothing more than "sheep hair soaked in shell-fish blood." Observations such as these were not intended to suggest that wealth, fame, or nobility were inherently undesirable. Indeed, some of the Stoics did designate such resources as "things preferred." However, advantages such as these could never be legitimately counted as intrinsically valuable because of the Stoic insistence that only virtue constituted an unconditional good.

Another characteristic attribute of the Stoic sage was an uncanny ability to remain imperturbable in the face of physical and emotional torment.[31] The wise man is not entirely numb to the disconcerting effects of such experiences; he does not conjure up some anesthetic state where fear and pain cease to exist. What sets him apart in such matters is the capacity to prevent these experiences from afflicting his spirit. Comprehending the grand design as only the truly wise can, the Stoic sage is afforded a perspective on life rendering him impervious to passions. These irrational spasms of the human soul (such things as fear, anger, grief, and jealousy) are restrained by an iron will, resulting in a mental attitude known as *apatheia*.[32] In essence, the fruit of the wise man's wisdom is a kind of inner fortress, a spiritual sanctuary that indemnifies him against the disorder and chaos that render tranquility impossible.[33] This accounts for Epictetus' exotic claim that the wise can be happy even on the rack (*Discourses* 2.19). It also explains why we find Marcus Aurelius (*Meditations* 4.3) reminding himself to seek the quiescent solitude of his inner citadel. Given his spiritual bastion, the wise man alone truly masters the art of living to the extent that his life combines winsome spirit with complete self-composure.

A final distinguishing feature of the Stoic sage involves an altruistic obligation (*oikeiosis*) toward others, an incumbency uniquely understood and accepted by the wise. Ultimately, the Stoic sage is not a citizen of some state; he is a citizen of the world. All men, from the highest rungs of society to the very lowest, have a claim upon his goodwill and fellowship for the simple reason that "we are all children of God" (Epictetus, *Disc.* 1.3). Accordingly, the wise man never lives a cloistered life. He is a public figure who sees the "other" as a colleague, a kinsman, and a brother. Given their superior appreciation of these divinely sanctioned bonds, the wise are uniquely committed to treating their fellow men as intimates, bestowing upon them all the concern and

generosity owed associate citizens of the "City of Zeus" (Aurelius, *Meditations* 4.23). These philanthropic sentiments would eventually come to exert a powerful influence upon the social, moral, and religious landscape of the Western world.

The Stoic Legacy

From the outset of the Stoic movement, the notion of the *cosmopolis* (world city) was a prominent feature of the school's teaching. We know, for example, that Zeno spoke of "one flock feeding in one pasture" and that the credibility of this ecumenical logic gained strength as time went on. In particular, these inclusive views had a tonic effect upon the old civic and national parochialisms that had traditionally served to divide humanity. According to Plutarch (*Alexander* 1.6), the idea that the entire *oikoumene* was a man's true fatherland inspired the thoughts and deeds of Alexander the Great. At the same time, these notions of a universal human community had the effect of diminishing the importance of birth, wealth, and social status.[34] The accidents of birth were deemed insignificant in comparison to the divine endowments enjoyed by all human beings. These perspectives helped to liberalize and humanize the social ethos of antiquity. Specifically, they led to an increasing appreciation of the fact that the institution of slavery was, in some fundamental sense, incompatible with the Order of Being. These are the views expressed by Epictetus (*Discourses* 1.13) in a remarkable passage that chastises a slave owner for the maltreatment of his bondsman:

> Slavish man! Will you not bear with your own brother, who has God for his Father, as being a son from the same stock, and of the same high descent? Will you not remember what you are, and over whom you bear rule — that the [slaves] are by nature your relations, your brothers; that they are the offspring of God?

In addition to its humanizing effects, Stoic cosmopolitanism also contained some important long-term political implications. If all men were rational by nature; if all men were capable of decoding the means and ends of a rationally ordered universe; and if all men were in some sense capable of abiding by the moral precepts embedded in nature, then all men were in principle entitled to a political voice. There was, in short, a democratic logic inherent in the ecumenical teachings of ancient Stoicism. Given the social dynamics of antiquity, it was impossible for these incipient features of Stoic philosophy to achieve fruition, but over time they would come to inspire important elements of modern democratic ideology. As W.J. Oates observes,

> The Stoic doctrine of the universal brotherhood of man has been of incalculable importance in the evolution of democratic theory, particularly in the liberal

> thought of the French eighteenth century and in the formation of the political institutions of the United States [xxiv].

Another significant facet of the Stoic legacy concerns the school's manifest contributions to Western religious belief. Throughout the Porch's long history, an undeniable religious spirit remained a central feature of the Stoic message. It not only informed foundational aspects of Stoic cosmology, it also shaped Stoic notions of human reality, including the duties and obligations incumbent upon all men. One of the earliest and most powerful illustrations of Stoic religiosity is Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*:

> O God most glorious, called by many a name,
> Nature's great King, through endless years the same;
> Omnipotence, who by thy just decree
> Controllest all, hail, Zeus, for unto thee
> Behoves thy creatures in all lands call.
> We are thy children, we alone, of all
> On earth's broad ways that wander to and fro,
> Bearing thine image wheresoe'er we go.
> Wherefore with songs of praise thy power I will forth show.
> Lo! yonder Heaven, that round the earth is wheeled,
> Follows thy guidance, still to thee doth yield
> Glad homage; thine unconquerable hand
> Such flaming minister, the levin brand,
> Wieldeth, a sword two-edged, whose deathless might
> Pulsates through all that Nature brings to light;
> Vehicle of the universal Word, that flows
> Through all, and in the light celestial glows
> Of stars both great and small. A King of Kings
> Through ceaseless ages, God, whose purpose brings
> To birth, whate'er on land or in the sea
> Is wrought, or in high heaven's immensity;
> Save what the sinner works infatuate.
> Nay, but thou knowest to make the crooked straight:
> Chaos to thee is order; in thine eyes
> The unloved is lovely, who didst harmonize
> Things evil with things good, that there should be
> One Word through all things everlastingly.
> One Word — whose voice alas! The wicked spurn;
> Insatiate for the good their spirits yearn:
> Yet seeing see not, neither hearing hear
> God's universal law, which those revere,
> By reason guided, happiness who win.
> The rest, unreasoning, diverse shapes of sin
> Self-prompted follow: for an idle name
> Vainly they wrestle in the lists of fame:
> Others inordinately riches woo,

Or dissolute, the joys of flesh pursue.
Now here, now there they wander, fruitless still,
For ever seeking good and finding ill.
Zeus the all-bountiful, whom darkness shrouds,
Whose lightning lightens in the thunder-clouds;
Thy children save from error's deadly sway;
Turn thou the darkness from their souls away:
Vouchsafe that unto knowledge they attain;
For though by knowledge art made strong to reign
O'er all, and all things rule righteously.
So by thee honoured, we will honour thee,
Praising your works continually with songs,
As mortals should; nor higher need belongs
E'en to the gods, than justly to adore
The universal law for evermore [Oates, 591–92, from J. Adam].

Contained within this wonderful paean we detect virtually all of the major Stoic themes — the divine guidance of the world, the bond between man and God, the all-suffusive Word, the beneficence of reason, and so forth. In addition, the tone of Cleanthes' hymn is clearly much like those of the Hebrew prophets or the prayers of the early church fathers. Nor were such powerful religious sentiments unique to Zeno's immediate successor. The same religious enthusiasm is found among several leading figures of the Roman Porch. Seneca, for example, offered an assessment of God's benign energies that sounds as if it were taken directly from the New Testament:

> That power [that shaped the universe] we sometimes call "the all-ruling God," sometimes the "incorporeal wisdom" which is the creator of mighty works, sometimes the "divine spirit" which through things great and small with duly strung tone, sometimes destiny or the changeless succession of causes linked to Another.[35]

The praise offered a solicitous God by Epictetus (*Discourses* 1.16) is yet another illustration of the worshipful sentiments with which the Stoics invested their philosophy:

> For if we had any sense, ought we to do anything else, in public and in private, than praise and extol the deity, and rehearse his benefits? Ought we not as we are digging, or ploughing, or eating, to sing this hymn of praise to God? "Great is God, that he has supplied us with the instruments to till the earth. Great is God, that he has given us hands, and the power to swallow, and a stomach: that he has given us the power to grow insensibly, and to breath in our sleep." This is the hymn we should sing on every occasion.

Statements such as these indicate a continuous tendency among the Stoics to blur the line between philosophy and theology. It is not surprising, therefore, that scholars have long identified Stoicism as a pivotal preparation for

Christianity. Indeed, we can legitimately think of Stoic homiletics as prophetic of Christianity or, as Augustine said, as the world's Christianity before the world knew Christ. Among a wide variety of affectations, the fledging faith seems to have been particularly influenced by the following Stoic notions: the logos doctrine interpreted as a divine governing spirit; an expanded and unified conception of humanity; and a moral teaching emphasizing the interior disposition of the agent.[36]

In addition to these general influences, Stoic philosophy proved to be particularly relevant for several of early Christianity's most seminal thinkers, not the least of whom was St. Paul.[37] Paul was a Pharisee and a native of Tarsus, located in what is today south-central Turkey. According to the geographer Strabo (*Geography* 14.5.13), Tarsus was a hotbed of philosophical activity, even surpassing Athens and Alexandria. Among the various schools of philosophy operating in the city, there was an active circle of Stoic thinkers that included Antipater, Archedemus, Nestor, and two individuals named Athenodorus. It is difficult to imagine Paul living in an environment such as this without being influenced, at least indirectly, by the speculative ferment of Stoicism. Paul's willingness to embrace various Stoic principles may also have been facilitated by the common features shared by Stoicism and the pharisaical version of Judaism. This is a point made by the Jewish statesman Josephus (*Life of Josephus* 12), who, in his autobiography, notes "points of resemblance" between the Porch and the Pharisees. In addition, it is important to bear in mind that Paul was a thoroughly Hellenized Jew. Not only was he a Roman citizen, he also seems to have been well versed in Hellenic literary traditions. In the Acts of the Apostles (17:28), for example, we find him quoting Aratus of Soli, a Stoic poet of the 3rd century B.C. Finally, there is the alleged correspondence between Paul and the Roman Stoic Seneca. These apocryphal missives, totaling 14 in all (8 from Seneca and 6 from Paul), may have been composed in the 4th century A.D. and were most likely responsible for St. Jerome's erroneous conclusion that Seneca was a Christian. Obviously, these forgeries do not demonstrate a link between the Roman Porch and the Apostle to the Gentiles. Still, their very existence, plus the interpretation applied to them, suggests the early church fully understood and accepted a Stoic-Christian nexus.

There are also textual elements within the Pauline epistles themselves that strongly suggest Stoic affinities. For example, the Stoic insistence that the wise make their way in life guided by a different standard is echoed by Paul's demand that the faithful not comply with the norms of this age but rather be transformed by a renewal of the mind (Romans 12).[38] In addition, the Stoic teaching that interior disposition is crucial to a properly conducted

life is a theme of great significance for Paul.[39] But beyond these and many other textual parallels that might be cited,[40] there is one obvious tie to Stoicism that dominates the spirit and tone of Paul's *parenesis* (exhortation): the ecumenical assertion that there is no distinction between Jew and Greek (Romans 10:12). Here we must ask how Paul, "an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin," became the Apostle to the Gentiles? In this regard, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Stoic cosmopolitanism, with its message of universal kinship, played a part in broadening the spiritual perspectives of Paul. The "Good News" was not to remain the privileged possession of a few. Rather, the light of the new faith was to shine upon all peoples, socio-ethnic distinctions notwithstanding. The expansion of religious horizons along these lines may well have made the difference between Christianity's original identity as a mere sect within Judaism and its subsequent development as a global faith.

The legal theory known as "natural law" is yet another contribution to Western thought directly attributable to Stoicism. The rudiments of this doctrine are traceable to the ancient sophists (5th century B.C.) and their distinction between *nomos* (man-made law) and *phusis* (natural law). The idea of a law broader than, and superior to, the legal standards of any given city-state was also advanced by philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle. In Stoic hands, these views eventually received their canonic expression in the form of a comprehensive system combining ontological and moral elements. In other words, the Stoics believed the rational, divine order they identified with "nature" contained a prescriptive logic binding upon all humanity. This *orthos logos*, or right reason, not only afforded man a definitive life-code but also provided a standard of justice and right by which all conventional legal systems were to be measured.

The *locus classicus* for these ideas is contained in a famous passage from Cicero's *Republic* (3.22):

> True law is right reason in agreement with nature; it is of universal application, unchanging and everlasting; it summons to duty by its commands, and averts from wrongdoing by its prohibitions. And it does not lay its commands or prohibitions upon good men in vain, though it neither have any effect on the wicked. It is a sin to try to alter this law, nor is it allowable to attempt to repeal any part of it, and it is impossible to abolish it entirely. We cannot be freed from its obligations by senate or people, and we need not look outside ourselves for an expounder or interpreter of it. And there will not be different laws at Rome and at Athens, or different laws now and in the future, but one eternal and unchanging law will be valid for all nations and all times, and there will be one master and ruler, that is, God, over us all, for he is the author of this law, its promulgator, and its enforcing judge. Whoever is disobedient is fleeing from himself and

> denying his human nature, and by reason of this very fact he will suffer the worst penalties, even if he escapes what is commonly called punishment.[41]

Many of these ideas eventually penetrated the Roman law. Gaius, a Roman jurist of the 2nd century A.D. whose work served as the foundation for Justinian's *Institutes*, identified the *ius gentium* (law of nations) with the natural law of Stoic tradition. The noted jurist Marcinus, who lived during the reign of Caracalla, spoke of a "higher" law by which men might distinguish good from evil and the just from the unjust. Similarly, Ulpian refers to a prescriptive essence of the universe by which men should chart their moral course. Nor did these features of the Stoic inheritance cease with the eclipse of Rome's hegemony. The medieval church gave new life to Stoic philosophy by fusing antiquity's law of nature with the law of God. Gratian (12th century), the father of canon law, argued for a fundamental correspondence between the law of nature and the divine decrees contained in Jewish and Christian scripture. These amalgamative tendencies received their definitive expression in the majestic synthesis of St. Thomas Aquinas (13th century), who combined Greek philosophy, Roman law, and the teachings of Christianity into an immensely authoritative and comprehensive system.[42]

In the modern era, the Stoic notion of natural law, with its emphasis on man's preeminent status in the grand design, led directly to the concept of natural rights. The Stoics believed that Nature itself provides a series of immutable standards, including the idea that man enjoyed a unique dignity and worth within the Order of Being. The basis of this claim lay in the incomparable rational status that man alone can claim. Only he is capable of consciously participating in the universal template ordained by God. In a sense, then, the law of nature bestows upon man a nobility that comes before any status that might be conferred by state or society. Accordingly, the dignity of humankind is an inherent feature of man's identity and takes precedence over the status designations bestowed by the social order. The "rights" of human worth are, therefore, a kind of irreducible patrimony inherent in human essence and thus are both natural and inalienable. Any attempt on the part of societal mechanism, including the state, to abrogate these rights is an affront against the fundamental value of the human person.[43] Today, these ideas are acknowledged features of any legitimate democratic society. What is less understood is the degree to which the origins of these principles are traceable to ancient Stoicism.

The final element of the Stoic legacy involves its contributions to capitalist economic doctrine. This claim will undoubtedly strike many readers as dubious, to say the least. In truth, however, Adam Smith, the man who wrote

The Wealth of Nations (1776), capitalism's creedal text, was much influenced by several key premises of Stoic philosophy. Evidence for this assertion is clearly seen in Smith's earlier work, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). In part VII of this text, for example, we discover Smith quoting lengthy passages from Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. In particular, the Stoic conception of a rational, universal design was endorsed by Smith and reconfigured to comply with Christian precepts. Indeed, it is not inappropriate to view Smith, along with several other members of the Scottish Enlightenment, as 18th-century Christian Stoics. Significantly, these adaptations of Stoic teaching were not restricted to Smith's moral discourse. As the editors of that work, D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie, correctly assert, "Stoicism never lost its hold over Smith's mind."[44] As a result, the *Wealth of Nations* should not be considered in isolation from the earlier treatise. When, for example, Smith advances his famous notion of the "invisible hand," an idea that today enjoys an almost sacral status among free-market advocates, we should recognize the argument for what it is — the Stoic theory of cosmic harmony applied to the marketplace. In other words, this compelling image of an economic system's innate capacity to produce benefit and harmony, notwithstanding the chaotic agitations of factious egos, is a metaphoric reference to Stoicism's belief that rational and benign forces ultimately guarantee order.

Stoic principles also led Smith to impose certain moral strictures upon the activities of the businessman. Here, we discover an interesting disconnect between what Smith actually advocated versus the claims advanced by modern interpretation. Given his ties to Stoic philosophy, Smith did not celebrate market dynamics as ends in themselves. The logic of the "invisible hand" was not proffered by Smith as a justification of economic narcissism. The grand design that inclines the marketplace to establish order spontaneously also includes a moral component. While it is true that Smith (*Theory of Moral Sentiments* 219) speaks of how "Everyman ... is first and principally recommended to his own care," all human conduct must ultimately comply with the larger moral purposes of God, and in this regard the economic domain can claim no special exemption. It is not the case, therefore, that Adam Smith supported the idea of "economic man" as advanced by neo-classical economics. Given his attachments to Stoic thought, especially the moral imperatives that were the school's preeminent concern, Smith would never have supported the anarcho-capitalism he is sometimes alleged to have endorsed.[45] Moral restraint and social obligation were integral aspects of his economic formula and these features are, in great measure, of Stoic provenance.

Notes

1. The original followers of Zeno were initially referred to as "Zenonians." Eventually, however, the school came to be known by its location—the painted portico (*stoa poecile*) at Athens.

2. See Lorimer's *Institutes of Law* (Edinburg: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1880), 150–51.

3. This is the man whom Plato famously described as "Socrates gone mad."

4. This influence is clearly alluded to by Diogenes Laertius (7.4) in his description of Zeno's *Republic*, which he says was "written on the dog's tail." This is a reference to the etymology of the word "cynic" (*kynikos*), meaning "dog-like."

5. Another early influence upon Zeno was Polemo, an Academic who is said to have instilled in him a love of poetry.

6. The school's third head was Chrysippus ("golden horse"), who proved to be a key figure in the development of Stoic logic. Above all, Chrysippus was responsible for establishing Stoic orthodoxy, an achievement that earned him a reputation as the school's second founder.

7. The Athenians were fond of describing those possessed of great personal discipline as "more temperate than Zeno the philosopher."

8. We have an example of this rejection aimed at Plato's epistemology. Antisthenes is alleged to have said that he could see a horse but not "horseness."

9. Diogenes was also noted for hundreds of acrimonious barbs typically aimed at the rich and powerful, arguably the most famous of which was his deflation of Alexander the Great (see D. Laertius 6.38).

10. For example, Crates is said to have felt no shame in indulging in public sex acts with his wife Hipparchia, and the comic poet Menander reports that he gave his daughter away in marriage on a one-month trial basis!

11. Involvement in that community remains a point of distinction between Stoic and Cynic. The latter advocated detachment while the former prescribed social involvement as a matter of moral duty.

12. The ancients referred to Heraclitus as "the Dark," a cognomen he richly deserved.

13. For example, Heraclitus states (Diels, fr. 30), "This ordered universe, which is the same for all, was not created by any one of the gods or of mankind, but it was ever and is and shall be everlasting fire."

14. As Stoic thought evolved, Heraclitean cosmology was replaced by Aristotle's view that the cosmos was a living creature.

15. The Scipionic Circle became the main advocates for Greek culture in Rome and included C. Laelius, L. Furius Philus, and P. Rutilius Rufus. Their efforts were sharply opposed by traditionalists such as Cato the Younger.

16. A view accepted by Epictetus, see Discourses (1.14.12)—and M. Aurelius (*Meditations* 5.27).

17. This last position implies a relative immortality of the soul, relative in the sense that Poseidonius also affirmed the Stoic theory of worldwide conflagration. Panaetius rejected the idea of the soul's indestructibility, delayed or otherwise.

18. As a student, Cicero had attended the lectures of Poseidonius at Rhodes. In addition, he spent time studying at Athens, the Mecca of advanced learning.

19. In A.D. 65 Seneca was forced to commit suicide for his alleged involvement in the Pisonian conspiracy against Nero.

20. The name Epictetus means "acquired"—a reference, no doubt, to the philosopher's earlier status as a slave. He was freed in Rome by his master Epaphroditus and later studied under the Stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus.

21. The cycle of rarefaction begins and ends in fire; as a result, many Stoics speak of the ekpyrosis (a fiery destruction of the world). This idea was rejected by Panaetius, who believed the world was indestructible.

22. This statement needs qualification to the extent that Stoicism does acknowledge certain incorporeals, such as place, time, void, and logical propositions known as *lekta*.

23. For the early Stoics, this active divine force was associated with fire (Heraclitus). Later members of the Porch described the godly presence in terms of pneuma, or breath, an idea that may have been derived from the medical theories of Praxagoras of Cos.

24. Views such as these inevitably raise the question of evil. The Stoics offered several explanations for what most people considered "evil." One argument advanced by Chrysippus is that evil and good are linked dialectically. In order for the good and the virtuous to exist, an oppositional category must also exist (see Gellius, *Attic Nights* 7.1). Another view entirely denies an existential status to evil. Rather, evil is a phantom born of misconception among those lacking a proper understanding of the world's rational order. Finally, some Stoics reasoned that the larger economy of the cosmos occasionally required a part to suffer on behalf of the whole. Viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*, this position tended to negate evil's sting by treating it as a necessary price paid for attaining an ultimate good.

25. See also M. Aurelius, *Meditations* 1.5 and 4.40.

26. As Epictetus says in the *Enchiridion* (17), "For it is your job to act well the part that is assigned to you; but to choose it is another's."

27. The affinity between morality and expedience is a major theme in Cicero's *De Officiis*, where he insists, "Nothing is really expedient that is not at the same time morally right, and nothing morally right that is not at the same time expedient" (3.7.34).

28. Seneca spoke of the wise man as being as rare as a phoenix.

29. The rigor of Stoic morality is seen in its moral intent. Stoics insist the truly virtuous must also will the good. Accordingly, an impure desire is as morally abhorrent as the gratification of that desire.

30. Cf. M. Aurelius, *Meditations* 8.47.

31. Stoic sangfroid even extended to self-annihilation. From the start, suicide was an acceptable practice among Stoics. In their view, whenever circumstances arose that made it impossible to live in concert with nature exit was the preferred response. Seneca, in particular, saw special virtue in the wise man's decision to end his life, deeming it a gesture of freedom and nobility (see *Epistle* 70). St. Augustine rejected this logic as inconsistent. If the wise lived lives of blissful self-sufficiency, why was there any need for departure (*City of God* 19.4)?

32. When considering the will of the wise man, Epictetus (*Discourses* 1.1) notes that not even Zeus could overwhelm the will of such an individual.

33. It is also necessary to protect this sanctuary. Epictetus (*Enchiridion* 16) notes that it is appropriate to empathize with those who suffer but warns that compassion must not be allowed to breach the walls of one's inner stronghold.

34. It has been suggested that the radical social reforms of King Cleomenes in 3rd-century B.C. Sparta were inspired by Stoicism. Cleomenes had studied under the Stoic philosopher Sphairos.

35. This declaration of the logos doctrine begs comparison with John 1:1–3. For a discussion of Seneca's statement, see V. Arnold, *Roman Stoicism*, 433.

36. In addition, the early church relied upon a Stoic-Philonian allegorical method (that of Philo Judaeus) to interpret the sayings of Jesus.

37. Other key church figures influenced by Stoicism include Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and John Chrysostom, all of whom were particularly partial to the ideas of Epictetus. In addition, St. Augustine was also influenced by Stoic philosophy, although his endorsement of Stoic views remained highly selective. He welcomed, for example, Stoic notions of krasis when explaining the hypostatic union. Similarly, he endorsed the Stoic idea that the passions were perturbations of the mind engendered by false judgment. Yet he rejected Stoic views of man's self-sufficiency in favor of an ultimate reliance upon God's grace. And, of course, Augustine disapproved of Stoic cosmology, with its assertion of monistic materialism.

38. Paul's discussion of Christian duties should be compared with Seneca's *On Mercy* 1.1–4, where the philosopher outlines the duties of a benign emperor.

39. See Romans 3:28 and I Timothy 1.5.

40. For example, I Corinthians 11:14, where Paul speaks of nature's instruction; see also Acts 17, especially lines 24–29, and Romans 2:14–15, where Paul describes a sense of lawfulness already written upon the hearts of the Gentiles.

41. See also Cicero *On Invention* 2.53.161 and *The Laws* 1.6.18–19.

42. The natural law tradition continued its complex development far beyond the Thomistic system and can be traced in later thinkers such as Jean Bodin, Francisco Suarez, Hugo Grotius, and Samuel Pufendorf.

43. In bringing indictments based upon "crimes against humanity," the Nuremberg Trials (1945–1946) invoked a logic redolent of Stoic teaching — there is a higher moral law by which the validity of positive law is to be judged. By this principle, the legal mandates of the Third Reich did not relieve political and military officials of their ethical obligation as rational beings.

44. See *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 5–6. Raphael and Macfie (20–21) also note that *The Wealth of Nations* represents a continuation of the principles set forth in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

45. Smith specifically warns against the activities of those who live by profits, such as merchants and manufacturers. They constantly seek to widen the market and narrow the competition contrary to public interest. Accordingly, he advises that any new laws or regulations proposed by these groups must be viewed with grave suspicion because such men "have generally an interest to deceive and even to oppress the public" (see *Wealth of Nations*, Book I, chapter 11, "Rent of Land: Conclusion").

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17

Galen (A.D. 129–199)

Physician, Scientist, Philosopher

In the history of ancient medicine there are two names that stand above the rest. The first is Hippocrates, the "Father of Medicine," a native of Cos, who was born in about 460 B.C. The second is that of the noted physician, anatomist, and medical author, Galen. Born at Peragmon, the son of a prosperous architect, Galen studied extensively at Corinth, Smyrna, and, most importantly, Alexandria, where, in addition to medicine, he also took an interest in the four great philosophical sects of his day — Platonism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism, and Epicureanism. This diverse educational background resulted in an intellect of impressive range and subtlety, and while it is true that Galen did not have the kind of trans-cultural impact comparable to that of Plato or Aristotle, in the medical sciences his influence upon researchers and practitioners alike was without equal in Western history.

Overview of Early Greek Medicine

> "A healer is a man worth many men in his knowledge of cutting out arrows and putting kindly medicines on wounds."

These words are offered by Homer in the *Iliad* (11.514–15)[1] and they reflect the considerable esteem with which the Greeks held those who could mend the flesh. It would be many centuries, however, before this respect was in any way proportional to practitioner competence. Indeed, early medical practices among the Hellenes were an amalgam of proto-rational, magical, and religious elements. In the absence of anything resembling a professional *iatros* (doctor), the ill and injured were compelled to seek medical advice from a wide range of quackish surrogates such as root cutters, midwives, charm sellers, and ath-

letic trainers. In addition, the Greeks were known to solicit medical counsel directly from Asclepius, the god of healing, in the form of "incubation" or temple sleep. We know of at least one hundred facilities along these lines, which, in addition to the temple itself, often included other amenities such as a library, a stadium and a theater. The most famous example of such healing shrines is the site at Epidaurus. Here, suppliants spent the night in a dormitory area known as the *abaton*, where the deity, or his daughters Hygeia and Panacea, visited them in their dreams and prescribed various remedies.[2]

Practices such as incubation, along with a variety of folk remedies and occultist practices, were a continuous feature of medical practice throughout Greek history. In the late 6th century B.C., however, a new and more rational understanding of these matters began to emerge that would eventually lead to a genuinely scientific understanding of the medical arts. The initial impetus for this inchoate rationalism can be traced to the thought of certain Presocratic philosophers. Chief among these thinkers were Alcmaeon of Croton and Empedocles of Acragas. The former was a younger contemporary of the philosopher Pythagoras and was probably an associate of the Pythagorean brotherhood.[3] He is best known for the medical theory that health consists of a proper *krasis* (blending) of opposing powers within the body (e.g., moist/dry, hot/cold, etc.) and that disease results from the unchecked dominion (*monarchia*) of a given quality. Alcmaeon also advanced a series of empirically based propositions concerning perception and the operation of our sensory organs. He was, for example, the first to distinguish between thought and sensation, and he is also credited with having correctly identified the brain, as opposed to the heart, as the true sensorium — an insight that even eluded the keen eye of Aristotle (see *De Anima* 2.3).

Empedocles was acknowledged by Galen as the founder of the Sicilian school of medicine and is also credited as the first to identify the four root substances that comprise reality — earth, air, fire, and water. In addition, Empedocles offered an explanation for generation and destruction in which the four foundational elements are either mixed or separated under the auspices of "love" or "strife" respectively.

Perhaps the most novel feature of these Presocratic thinkers was their efforts to explain the world without appeal to religious theory. In their view, the natural realm contained its own logic, independent of soul, spirit, and divinity, and while the Greek affinity for *a priori* assessments remained a continuous impediment to a fully evolved empiricism, the rational secularism of men such as Alcmaeon and Empedocles supplied the essential foundations for the medical "schools" of the 5th and 4th centuries B.C.

Historians have traditionally identified three major medical orientations

among the ancient Greeks: the Sicilian, the Cnidian, and the Coan. But designating any of these groups as "schools," suggesting thereby some form of institutionalized arrangement, is highly misleading. There were no formal mechanisms of medical instruction in ancient Greece and it is not until the Hellenistic period that we find physicians self-consciously attached to a specific set of theories and practices.[4] In fact, it was not until well after Galen that anything approaching an actual medical curriculum could be identified. During the classical era, a doctor acquired his skills from an extended period of personal trial and error, or more typically through an apprenticeship with an experienced *iatros*. It is best, therefore, to think of the traditional "schools" as loosely affiliated sects whose collective identities were traceable to a series of generally accepted principles and practices.

As noted earlier, the Sicilian school drew much of its inspiration from Empedocles and, less directly, from the medical teachings of the Pythagoreans. The basic doctrines espoused by the Sicilian practitioners included the following[5]: the four fundamental elements (fire, earth, water, air) were associated with the traditional opposing qualities (hot, dry, wet, cold); the blood around the heart was the seat of human consciousness; respiration took place through all the pores of the body and was related to the blood's motion; all the phenomena of human life, including health, could only be properly understood in relation to the whole of nature; and, if we can judge from a famous fragment attributed to Empedocles, the Sicilians also espoused a remarkable optimism as to the curative potentials of medicine and medical research.[6]

The medical sect known as the Cnidians took its name from Cnidos, a Lacedaemonian colony on the Asiatic coastline. The leading figure among these physicians was Euryphon, who is believed to have been roughly contemporary with Hippocrates. Our knowledge of the Cnidian "school" is based upon several references in Galen's work, as well as certain works within the *Corpus Hippocraticum*[7] which scholars believe reflect the orientations and techniques of this group — e.g. *Diseases II*, *Internal Affections* and the gynecological treatises. In addition, one of the Hippocratic essays, *Regimen in Acute Diseases*, provides a detailed criticism of Cnidian methodology. Collectively, these sources provide the following portrait of Cnidian medicine: Unlike the Sicilian and Coan schools, the Cnidians did not espouse a general theory of pathology. In addition, they seem to have been ill disposed toward medical theory in general. Instead, they tended to focus the bulk of their energies on symptomatology and treatment. According to their Coan critics, these orientations were misguided to the extent that they tended to minimize other critical considerations such as prognosis and etiology. Moreover, it was alleged that the Cnidians tended to proliferate diseases by misinterpreting each additional

symptom as evidence of a new illness. In addition, the Cnidians were accused of relying upon an unacceptably limited series of treatments, with excessive reliance upon the use of purges. Interschool disparagements such as these were a common feature of the agonistic mentality typical of the Greeks.[8] It is difficult, therefore, to assess how much of the criticism is valid and how much simply reflects the acrimony of an adversarial group. What can be said with certainty, however, is that the Cnidian insistence upon accurate and meticulous classification of diseases was a remarkably modern approach suggestive of a legitimately scientific orientation.

These scientific perspectives were advanced further by the classical era's most famous medical "school," the Hippocratics. Based on the island of Cos, the Coan practitioners were instrumental in establishing a distinguishable science of medicine based upon carefully recorded and meticulously detailed observation.[9] In addition, the documents comprising the Hippocratic corpus clearly denote a hitherto unknown sense of professional awareness.[10] In particular, the authors of these texts unmistakably distinguish themselves from priests and philosophers. In sharp contrast to these unrestrained speculators, the Hippocratics declare themselves to be an autonomous society of rationally guided medical experts.

In terms of general methodology, the Coan physicians took a holistic approach that included the physical and psychological[11] disposition of the patient plus the overall environment in which the individual lived. Among the many variables a doctor was obligated to consider in the course of his treatment were the patient's age and constitution, the physical setting, the season of the year, and the diseases' typical progression.[12] Above all, the Hippocratics believed that nature itself was the great healer and that the constitution of the human organism naturally tended toward an internal equilibrium conducive to health. Accordingly, the chief role of the physician was to facilitate nature in the reestablishment of an inner balance. Typically, this was accomplished through a therapeutic regimen of rest or exercise (depending upon the ailment), dietetics, and the use of various drugs.[13]

The idea that human health was directly related to a balance or harmony of internal elements was certainly not unique to the Coans. In fact, in one form or another, this concept was the operational premise of all Greek medicine.[14] Among the Hippocratic physicians, however, it served as the foundational logic for the important theory of humors. According to this teaching, there were four essential substances operating within the human body—blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile.[15] When these elements were in a state of *eukrasia* (i.e., properly mixed), an individual experienced health. But when the humors were improperly combined (*dyskrasia*), a state of disease

would ensue directly related to the improper dominion of a particular humor. The illness would manifest itself through a series of telltale symptoms easily understood by the physician. For example, an individual who suddenly became bad tempered and irritable was "bilious" (suffering from an excess of yellow bile). A patient who became listless, impassive, and unemotional was "phlegmatic" (suffering from an excess of phlegm). Given their dedication to this humoral scheme, the Hippocratic practitioners saw little need to focus much attention on diagnosis — disease was simply a matter of humoral imbalance. This explains the Coan school's tendency to concentrate most of their energies on a disease's likely course and the patient's prospects for recovery (i.e., prognosis).

Historically speaking, the humoral scheme of the Hippocratics cast a long shadow to the extent that it was endorsed by Galen and became a central premise of the Pergamene's pathological theory. But the most important legacy of the Coan medical tradition was neither its theoretical foundations nor its curative strategies, but rather the school's curiosity toward, and devotion to, scientific truth. The unique nature of this devotion is readily seen by any comparison with other ancient civilizations. The Ebers and Smith papyri, for example, are key sources of information regarding ancient Egyptian medical practices. What they reveal is a medical approach fervently dedicated to the use of spells and incantations. The absence of scientific mentality among the Egyptians is also indicated by their lack of interest in studies such as anatomy — a remarkable disinterest given their extensive experience with embalming techniques. These same nonscientific orientations are also evident among the ancient Israelites, who understood disease not as a naturalistic phenomenon but as a heaven-sent affliction, often assigned on an intergenerational basis.[16] Similarly, the many dietary and hygienic prescriptions set forth in the Hebrew Bible are not the product of rational study and analysis but are instead part of an all-encompassing religious obligation that left little room for scientific inquiry.

In marked contrast, Greek medicine, and specifically the orientations associated with the Hippocratic physicians, displayed an unprecedented devotion to scientific precepts. Evidence for this claim is found throughout the Hippocratic corpus but there are two treatises in particular that unequivocally demonstrate the scientific spirit the Greeks lent the healing arts. The first is a work composed between 430 and 400 B.C. titled *Ancient Medicine*. In it, the author asserts the necessity of a new approach by which physicians are to be guided. Specifically, they must not allow themselves to be led astray by the empty hypothetic reasoning of the philosophers.[17] It is not the job of a doctor to speculate on "things in the sky or below the earth." Medicine seeks concrete solutions to solvable problems and, as such, must rely upon observed data,

measured accuracy, and unassuming judgments.[18] This is the proper way to practice the medical arts, and the author also insists it is the only correct way to investigate the natural sciences in general.[19]

The second work illustrative of a genuine science of medicine among the Greeks is a treatise on epilepsy titled *The Sacred Disease*. The author maintains from the outset that this malady is no more divine or sacred than any other disease and that its causes are entirely natural. In truth, epilepsy's traditional status as a god-dispatched illness was based entirely on inexperience and ignorance. In the absence of concrete medical knowledge, magicians, purifiers, and charlatans relied upon superstition as a means of explaining and treating the ailment. In contrast, the trained physician understands that epilepsy is a brain-based disorder involving a disruption of the humoral balance. Specifically, the author argues, it is caused by an excess of phlegm in the veins, which prevents a healthy flow of air to the brain. In addition, he conjectures that heredity plays a probable role in the disease. Admittedly, these assessments reflect all of the aprioristic tendencies we have noted among ancient Greek physicians but they also signal the end of preternaturalism and the corresponding rudiments of a rationally based medical science.

Galen and His Influence

In many respects, Galen's approach to medicine can be seen as a synthesis of the Hippocratic school and the teachings of the medical experts at Alexandria, which included the likes of Praxagoras, Herophilus, and Erasistratus. From the former, Galen adopted the humoral theory and the idea that doctors must treat the whole patient, not simply a limited range of symptoms. From the Alexandrians, Galen acquired a more empirical view of medicine including his unprecedented reliance upon systematic experimentation. In particular, Galen distinguished himself as a master of medical dissection. The roster of specimens that came under his knife was truly remarkable and included horses, camels, cows, wolves, snakes, elephants and (his favorite test animal) the Barbary ape (*Macaca sylvanus*). In addition, Galen conducted a significant number of vivisections where pigs and goats were the preferred subjects. These activities provided Galen with a rich and extensive source of medical information. Through these studies, for example, Galen came to understand the difference between veins and arteries and that the latter transmitted blood, not air. He also recognized the nature and function of the heart's valves (although a complete grasp of the circulatory system's mysteries would have to await William Harvey). In addition, he was among the first to comprehend the role played by the brain in controlling muscular function.[20]

The learning he acquired at Alexandria proved particularly useful when Galen assumed his first medical assignment as physician to the Pergamon gladiators, a position he held for approximately four years. Eventually, he moved to Rome, where he practiced and taught for the bulk of his career, acquiring a reputation that earned him an appointment as personal physician to the emperor Marcus Aurelius. Later, he would also attend to the health needs of Commodus and Septimius Severus. He died in Rome in A.D. 199.

For the next 1,400 years the "Galenic System" dominated Western medicine. In fact, certain of his medical texts were still being used in European universities as late as the 19th century. There are several reasons for this enduring influence, not the least of which was the fact that Galen was a true polymath. In addition to being a great physician, he was also proficient in logic, ethics, philology and philosophy. This meant that his many publications, of which there are well over 100 confirmed titles, were written in a manner that was as sophisticated as it was authoritative. Just as Aristotle became "the philosopher," so, too, did Galen's views become the sovereign voice for everything pertaining to the medical sciences.[21]

The means by which Galen came to enjoy this definitive stature is interesting, particularly to the extent that it involved the dedicated efforts of a non–Western people — the Arabs. Beginning in the 9th century, Arabic scholars began to aggressively collect Greek manuscripts. Many of these documents were eventually rendered into Syriac by a group of itinerant Nestorian Christians who had relocated to Jundi Shapur, Persia.[22] These works were then translated into Arabic. One translator and disseminator was the Arab physician, Hunayn ibn Ishāq. Hunayn's efforts not only stimulated the development of medical science in the Arab world, they were also critically significant for Europe, because in the 11th century these Arab texts became the source for Latin translations.[23] The Latin versions helped revive Western appreciation of ancient Greek science, and specifically inspired the medical humanists of the 15th and 16th centuries to replicate the experiments and observations recorded by Galen.

Galen is unquestionably one of the greatest figures in the history of medicine, a man whose legacy determined the course of Roman, Arab, Byzantine and European medicine for centuries.[24] From this, however, we should not conclude that Galen was without his shortcomings. He was not, for instance, immune to one of Greek science's chief deficiencies — a tendency to allow "concept" to supersede observed data. Although there is little question that Galen did advance the ancient world's empirical standards, his system nevertheless contained a variety of presumptive features, chief of which was a tendency to view medical phenomena from a teleological perspective.[25] In addition, Galen subscribed to a variety of medical theories and practices that

seem childish by contemporary standards: the humoral doctrine of the Hippocratics; Aristotle's four qualities (wet, dry, cold, hot); his belief in occult substances such as pneuma; and recourse to venesection (indeed, he even bled the bleeding).

Eccentricities such as these make it easy for modern students of medical history to dismiss Galen. But while invidious comparisons along these lines may be easy to formulate, their accuracy and relevance remain suspect. Failure to approach this issue with a diachronic lens (i.e., from a historical, developmental perspective) will almost certainly result in the sort of distortive anachronism that renders meaningful assessment impossible. We must remember, for example, how much of what passed for medicine in the 2nd century A.D. was in truth an uncouth blend of folk remedy and thaumaturgy. In comparison to the prevailing medical hocus-pocus, Galen's methods and approaches represent some of Western medicine's most important scientific advances.[26]

Again, when examining the criticisms leveled against Galen by later physicians and scientists, one should note the degree to which even their work was indebted to this medical pioneer. Paracelsus[27] correctly insisted that chemistry, not humors, was the proper basis of medicine, but it was Galen who first combined the physics and chemistry of his day into a legitimate scientific framework; Versalius was responsible for dramatic reforms in anatomy, but it was Galen who first insisted on making anatomy an integral part of medicine; and Harvey reformed medical physiology, but it was Galen who endowed the West with much of the experimental method upon which Harvey relied.[28]

Perhaps the most important and far-reaching contribution Galen made to Western medicine was his insistence upon enhanced observational and experimental standards. In so doing, he helped initiate the process by which an applied art gradually evolved into a genuine science of healing. In fact, one could reasonably argue that the full significance of these improved standards had implications well beyond healthcare. The reborn Galenism of the Renaissance period, for example, not only revitalized the field of medicine, it also served as a general stimulus for the emergence of modern scientific consciousness itself.[29] Accordingly, Galen fully merits his acknowledged status as the most influential figure in medical history. In fact, the scientific spirit he bestowed upon Western medicine may qualify him as a more deserving claimant to Hippocrates' famous title.

Notes

1. They refer specifically to Machon, the son of Asclepius, who was wounded by Paris and forced to withdraw from combat.

2. This "temple sleep" was famously mocked by Aristophanes in his *Plutus* (676–81), where the priests are described as stealing the personal belongings of the suppliants as they slept.

3. There is evidence to suggest that both Empedocles and Alcmaeon were influenced by Pythagoreanism. In addition to his work *On Nature*, Empedocles also wrote *Purifications*, in which Pythagorean teachings figure prominently, including transmigration of souls and prohibitions against bloodshed.

4. See G. Lloyd and N. Sirin, *The Way and the Word* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 113.

5. See W.H.S. Jones, *Philosophy and Medicine in Ancient Greece* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1946), 10–11.

6. "You shall learn all the drugs that exist as a defense against illness and old age; for you alone will accomplish all this. You shall check the force of the unwearying winds which rush upon the earth with their blasts and lay waste the cultivated fields. And again, if you wish, you shall conduct the breezes back again. You shall create a seasonable dryness after the dark rain for mankind, and again you shall create after summer drought the streams that nourish the trees. . . . And you shall bring out of Hades a dead man restored to health" (Diels, fr. 111, in *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, trans. K. Freeman [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957], 64).

7. A collection of roughly sixty medical treatises written between 450 and 350 B.C. in a modified Ionic dialect. Despite bearing his name, none of these works can specifically be identified as written by Hippocrates.

8. See G.E.R. Lloyd, *Adversaries and Authorities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chapter 2.

9. A good illustration of these points are the forty-two clinical histories recorded in *Epidemics*, which are remarkable for their precise detail.

10. Unlike medical practice among the Babylonians, where Herodotus reports everyone was an amateur physician (see *History* 1.197).

11. See, for example, *Decorum* 16.

12. See *Nature of Man* 9 and *Airs Waters Places* 1.

13. The Hippocratic pharmacopoeia contained approximately three hundred drugs. In this area the Greeks were heavily indebted to the Egyptians.

14. It is also a good illustration of the chief mental vice of the ancient Greeks—a reliance on suppositional assertions lacking in empirical foundation. Modern science is not without its myopic features, however, as T.S. Kuhn has argued; see *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1970), especially 24, 27, 91, 97, and 163.

15. A good summary of this theory is contained in the Hippocratic treatise *Nature of Man* (4).

16. A good illustration being Deut. 28:58–59: "If you are not careful to observe every word of the law which is written in this book, and to revere the glorious and awesome name of the Lord, your God, he will smite you and your descendants with severe and constant blows, malignant and lasting maladies" (see also Exodus 15:26).

17. In antiquity the term "hypothesis" did not suggest anything equivalent to the modern term. A hypothesis, for the ancient Greeks, referred to a postulate, not a theory based on observed data requiring experimental verification.

18. The lack of pretension among the Hippocratics is well expressed in the following maxim from among the school's aphorisms: "Life is short, and the art long; opportunity fleeting; experiment dangerous, and judgment difficult."

19. See *Ancient Medicine* 20.

20. Galen also advanced the science of pharmacology, creating a remarkably complex system of remedies (in some cases, combining as many as 100 discrete ingredients).

To this day, pharmacists continue to speak of "galenical" drugs to indicate nonchemical curatives.

21. By indenturing themselves to Galen's authority, later physicians tended to impede the progress of medical science. The fault lies with those who offered uncritical obeisance at the altar of Galenic medicine.

22. At the Council of Ephesus at A.D. 431, the Nestorians were declared heretical for their views regarding the nature of Christ and for their rejection of Mary's title as "Mother of God" (*Theotokos*). Some of the group moved eastward, settling in Persia.

23. In addition to Syriac, Arabic, and Latin translations, Galen's works were also translated into Hebrew and Armenian.

24. His works were prescribed readings for generations of medical students at Bologna, Marburg, Padua, and Tübingen.

25. A good illustration of these tendencies is found in the work *On the Natural Faculties* (3.3), where Galen discusses the uterus, insisting that it reflects the "artistic tendency" of nature.

26. Galen's rejections of things such as astrological number medicine and medical divination were as scathing as they were categorical.

27. Paracelsus, who burned Galen's works at Basel in 1527, may have helped establish the foundations of pharmaceutical chemistry, but, given his preference for hermeticism, he also counseled physicians to seek the advice of old wives, gypsies, and sorcerers.

28. See O. Temkin, "Galenicals and Galenism in the History of Medicine," in *The Impact of Antibiotics on Medicine and Society*, ed. I. Galdston (New York: International University Press, 1958).

29. These points did not go unnoticed by Galileo, who offered high praise for Galen's experimental methods.

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18

Plotinus (A.D. 205–270)

Mystic Philosopher

There is little debate among scholars that Plotinus was the father of Western mysticism[1] and that the Plotinian world picture, in both its ontological and its theological aspects, played a critical role in shaping the Occidental imagination. Indeed, R.T. Wallis observes that a proper survey of Neoplatonism, the version of Platonism we identify with Plotinus' achievement, would become nothing less than a cultural history of Europe and the Near East up to the Renaissance.[2] Similarly, E.R. Dodds has marveled at the capacity of Plotinus' thought "to fertilize the minds" of men as remarkably diverse as Augustine, Boethius, Dante, Meister Eckhart, Coleridge, Bergson, and T.S. Eliot.[3]

At least part of the explanation for the exceptional length and breadth of Plotinus' influence stems from the fact that he was able to synthesize a vast amount of material from earlier schools of Greek philosophy. In addition to Platonism, the *Enneads*,[4] (Plotinus' masterpiece as organized and edited by his student Porphyry), contains Pythagorean, Parmenidean, Aristotelian, and Stoic elements. In describing Plotinus as a "synthesizer," one should not conclude that his achievement lay simply in a skillful reconfiguration of preexisting subject matter. On the contrary, the amalgamation of these materials was an intellectual and spiritual *tour de force* that represents nothing less than a philosophical capstone for eight centuries of Hellenic intellectualism. Simply put, the new whole prescribed by Plotinus equaled more than the sum of its parts. Among other things, it ingeniously addressed a variety of speculative dilemmas that had vexed Greek philosophy for centuries, including the relationship between the one and the many, the enigma of divine transcendence versus divine immanence, and the connection between the intelligible and sensible worlds. Plotinus' solutions to these venerable questions certainly did not

resolve all of the issues inherent in such complex matters. Still, his proposals were a worthy attempt at real answers that inspired and informed the Western tradition to an unprecedented degree.

Yet another explanation for the notable success Plotinus enjoyed as a thinker and systematizer may lie in the content of his message and its affinities with the spirit of the age. Humanity's concern with matters divine is undoubtedly part of the *philosophia perennis* and, to one degree or another, a thematic constant that transcends time and place. In Plotinus' day, however, there existed a particularly pronounced otherworldly aspiration. This tendency was the inevitable result of Eastern religious influences that increasingly functioned as a potent alternative to Hellenic rationalism. In this regard, Plotinus is noteworthy as the last thinker to insist upon reason as the indispensible foundation for the spiritual journey prescribed in the *Enneads*, but he did so while simultaneously affirming that humanity's destiny ultimately resided in the religious mysticism of the inner life. It can be said, therefore, that the Plotinian formula was precisely the right message at the right time. It was a meaningful response to the spiritual longing of the age that nevertheless maintained a foundational role for the dominant intellectual traditions of Greco-Roman civilization.

Life of Plotinus

Although there are no autobiographical materials available for Plotinus, we do possess a variety of details from several sources. One of these is a 4th-century author named Eunapius, who claims Plotinus was born in the Egyptian city of Lycopolis ("wolf city"). Yet the use of idiomatic Greek in Plotinus indicates that he was a native speaker and suggests he was Greek or at least a highly Hellenized Egyptian. Presumably, Plotinus received the traditional literature-based Greek education as a youth.

By far the most extensive source of information regarding Plotinus' biography is the work composed by his disciple Porphyry titled *The Life of Plotinus*. Here we learn that in his late twenties Plotinus felt compelled to study philosophy. So moved, he traveled to Alexandria in an effort to find a teacher who might direct the advanced phases of his education. Initially, the various lectures he attended proved a source of profound disappointment. Finally he was referred to the school of Ammonius,[5] where he would remain for the next eleven years. The exact nature of Ammonius' instruction remains unknown. In fact, Porphyry states that Plotinus and several other students pledged not to reveal the content of the lectures (*Life* 3.25). In any event, the teachings of Ammonius must have been highly attractive, if the roster of gifted men

attending his school is any indication — Erennius, Olympus, Origen, and Longinus, among others.

After his time with Ammonius, Plotinus sought to expand his intellectual horizons by acquiring the insights of Eastern philosophy. Toward this end, he joined the military campaign of Emperor Gordian III against Persia in 243. The emperor was murdered by his own troops in 244, whereupon Plotinus fled to Antioch, eventually making his way to Rome. Plotinus was then forty years of age, and it was at this point that he began offering public lectures based on the philosophy of Ammonius (*Life* 3.34). After teaching at Rome for ten years, Plotinus finally embarked upon his literary career. Much of the content of the *Enneads* is probably written accounts of the discussions that took place at the school.

In describing his master, Porphyry makes it clear that Plotinus was a man of extraordinary intellectual and moral caliber and that these assets gained him the respect and trust of the Roman elite. Specifically, Porphyry notes the high regard in which the Emperor Gallienus held Plotinus (*Life* 12.1).[6] He also speaks of how many members of the Roman Senate routinely attended his lectures. Moreover, Porphyry tells of numerous men and women of the highest rank who, upon the approach of death, entrusted their children and property to Plotinus as a worthy guardian of both (*Life* 9.6).

This same worthiness is offered by Porphyry as an explanation of how the master was able to achieve the *unio mystica*, or mystical joining with God. Porphyry explains that on four occasions he personally witnessed Plotinus attain the crowning moment of the spiritual life (*Life* 23.17).[7] In addition, Porphyry himself claims, writing then as a sixty-eight-year-old man, that once he also united with "the God who is over all things." After these precious instances of spiritual bliss, returning to the mundane callings of life tended to produce a sense of confusion and impropriety. When, therefore, the hour of Plotinus' death arrived in 270,[8] it almost certainly was embraced by the philosopher as a joyous liberation from the burdens of corporeal existence. Tradition has it his final words were these: "Try and give back the god in you to the divine in the All."

Platonic Foundations

Although when scholars refer to Plotinus and his school today they routinely speak of "Neoplatonism,"[9] there is little doubt that, were Plotinus alive to hear this designation, he would be thoroughly perplexed. As far as Plotinus and his colleagues were concerned, there was nothing distinctively "new" about their brand of Platonism. Rather, they understood themselves as merely

extending a long and distinguished philosophical tradition by making more explicit the underlying meaning of Plato's thought. To some degree, a legitimate case can be made for this logic. Many facets of Plotinian philosophy are clearly derived from key dialogues within the Platonic corpus. At the same time, however, Neoplatonism cannot be properly understood as simply a series of detailed extrapolations from dialogues such as *Parmenides*, *Timaeus*, and *Symposium*. Not only does Plotinus broaden the scope of Platonic spirituality in an unprecedented manner, he also develops new elements that in fact depart from the path set down by Plato.

Among the many areas of accord between Plato and Plotinus, the following points are, perhaps, the most significant. In *Parmenides* (141e–142a), Plato speaks of the One's ineffability and of the fact that this pinnacle of existence is, in some sense, beyond being (*epekeina ousia*). Again, in *Republic* (508c–509b), Plato refers to the luminous effects of the Good but notes that it lies far beyond existence in dignity and power. In *Timaeus* (29e–30c) the universe is described as a unified, rational, benignly organized whole because God generously wishes that all things should be as good as possible. In the same dialogue Plato also advances the idea that our presence in this world constitutes an alien existence (*Tim* 90A–D), and that true happiness is only achieved by empowering our inner divinity. These thoughts are echoed in *Theaetetus* (176b), where Plato advises his reader to "fly away from earth to heaven"; that is, we must dedicate ourselves to a quality of life that allows for assimilation to God. In *Sophist* (248e–249b) we find Plato insisting that existence brims with life and mind and that knowledge is the propelling force of being. And in the *Second Letter*[10] (312e), Plato speaks about a "King of all" who is the end of all things and the cause of all good. More, he refers to a second and third "principle" in a tone highly suggestive of Plotinus' emanative scheme (see below).

These and other passages in the Platonic dialogues are foundational premises for much of the mystic philosophy proffered in the *Enneads*. The major points of connection can be summarized as follows: the visible world is at best an inexact facsimile of a higher realm; reality, in the highest and truest sense, is immaterial; Intuitive understanding is superior to discursive reasoning; we are soul creatures who long to return "home"; and the universe is a benignly organized cosmos. As significant as these mutually upheld premises are, they should not suggest that Plotinus, and those who came after him, were slavishly committed to some prosaic replication of Plato's thought. Plotinus was, indeed, a Platonist, but his work reflects both his own unique intuitions as a thinker and centuries of intellectual and spiritual tradition. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that Neoplatonism is fully prepared to amend, extend,

reinterpret, and alter views originally advanced by Plato in the 4th century B.C. In Plotinus' case, there are several clear examples of this willingness to vary and innovate. The world-soul (*hē tou kosmou psychē*) referenced by Plato in *Timaeus* is embedded by Plotinus in the hypostatic Soul of his cosmology. Also in *Timaeus*, Plato flirts with the idea of an evil soul responsible for disorder and chaos, a position he more fully advances in *Laws* (896d, 898b, 904b) and *Epinomis* (988d–e). Plotinus, however, refuses to dignify iniquity in this manner and instead depicts evil as a kind of privation explained by extreme remoteness from the Good. In Book 6 of *Republic*, Plato famously describes the Good as the supreme "Form" that lends existence and meaning to the world. Plotinus maintains the functional significance of the Good but places it beyond the Forms in a locale that defies all locative and conceptual reference. Finally, Plato and Plotinus agree that we are, by nature, the children of a higher and better place and that our mission in this life is to return to our point of spiritual origin. But whereas Plato speaks of "ascending" to the Realm of Ideas, Plotinus' notion of ascent is best described as a withdrawal into oneself. His mystic journey does not involve a dialectical ladder as much as it does a penetration to the deepest and purest recesses of the human soul.[11]

The Neoplatonic School

The original Plotinian school in Rome apparently operated on a seminar basis in which key texts were read and discussed. In addition to many Platonic dialogues,[12] the writings of several middle Platonists and Neopythagoreans were also considered, including the works of Numenius of Apamea (A.D. 150–215), who anticipated Plotinus' thought in many details. The breadth of materials considered by Plotinus and those of his circle suggests the school was an "open" environment intellectually speaking, where a variety of philosophical perspectives were tolerated, if not encouraged. This apparent lack of doctrinal rigidity suggests there was no lockstep loyalty demanded by or extended to the master. This, in turn, means variation within the school's foundational norms was a real possibility, and that is precisely the practice we detect over the school's long history.

In general terms, there are two broad trends evident in the developmental history of Neoplatonism. Using the philosophy of Plotinus as a baseline, we can detect an increasing interest in, and reliance upon, theurgic[13] elements plus a strong tendency to proliferate the hierarchic features of Plotinus' original emanative scheme. With regard to the former tendency, Neoplatonism emerged in an era strongly attached to preternatural assumption. Magic, astrology, and various astral religions enjoyed wide and deeply held conviction

for many. Not surprisingly, these views did penetrate the thinking of many Neoplatonists, a process that began as early as the thought of Porphyry, who admired the Chaldean Oracles[14] and who also expressed far more concern with soteriology than his master.[15] These trends in favor of *pistis* over *logos* continued over time. Iamblichus, for example, saw prayer and ritual as essential means by which to exploit the "sympathies" uniting the noetic and earthly realms. Much of the need for these connective links lies in the rejection by later Neoplatonists of Plotinus' doctrine of the undescended soul, by which he advanced the view that human reason alone is enough to achieve divinization. In the absence of this elevated conception of the soul, mankind needed the special assistance of supernatural powers to facilitate a return to God. Toward the end of the school's formal history, this reliance upon theurgy had become so pronounced that it would not be inaccurate to describe later Neoplatonism as more of a religion than a philosophy.

In terms of the increasing complexity of Plotinus' original cosmology, two key figures are Iamblichus and Proclus. The former claimed there was something even beyond Plotinus' ultimate metaphysical category (the One), something that he referred to simply as the "Ineffable." For his part, Proclus insisted upon a horizontal enrichment of Plotinus' vertical view of emanation. According to this idea, each outpouring engenders a series of "monads" belonging to the same unit, which in turn produces "a multiple allied to itself."[16] Even the One is not immune to these proliferating tendencies. Proclus argues that the One's supreme unity was subject to a baroque unfolding in the form of "henads."[17] The end result of this penchant to expand the original Plotinian framework was a paradoxic system that was vertically monistic but horizontally dualistic.

Plotinian Cosmology

There is no facet of Plotinus' worldview more interesting or more imaginative than his ontology (i.e., his theory of the nature and order of being). In this regard, there is evidence to suggest Plotinus' views were not entirely original, and that he was anticipated in certain essentials by several earlier thinkers. For example, the doctrine of emanation, a kind of divine declension, is clearly present in later Stoicism, and specifically in the thought of Poseidonius.[18] In addition, the Neopythagorean Moderatus of Gades argues that matter is ultimately a derivation from God and that there are three Hypostases, or cosmic "persons." Similarly, the philosophy of Numenius of Apamea includes so many features also present in Plotinus' system that the latter was accused of plagiarism.[19] Still, antecedent theories notwithstanding, it is impos-

sible to deny the fundamental power and originality of Plotinus' thought. Indeed, any attempt to dismiss his ripened views as a mere congeries of earlier ideas would constitute a gross distortion of the substance and magnitude of his achievement.

With these qualifications in mind, we are now free to investigate the general premises of Plotinian cosmology. In broad terms, Plotinus' thought can be outlined in the following manner: The universe reflects a plurality of spheres of being, which are arranged in hierarchical order. Each sphere is derived from a superior, preceding domain that is unrelated to conventional notions of time and space.[20] These spheres are affirmed in their own reality by a connection to the preceding structure, which is beheld as an object of contemplative desire. Each lower dimension within the hierarchy is a likeness or expression of the level above it, as image is to archtype. The lower the sphere within the hierarchical order, the greater the multiplicity and the greater the separateness from the superior, higher levels. All aspects of the ontological order are derived from the One, so designated to indicate a status of complete separateness and simplicity. Finally, the entire arrangement is animated by a double rhythm—*proodos* and *epistrophe* (i.e., emanation and return). All existence, both spiritual and material, is an efflux of the One and all that flows from this universal fount longs to return to its source (see below).[21]

As the preceding summary suggests, Plotinus advances the existence of several primary provinces within the order of being. These are known as Hypostases, variously translatable as "substance," "support," or "real being." Of the three major elements he describes under this heading, the first, and by far the most significant for the entire system, is the One. Plotinus was inclined to use a variety of terms in describing this critical entity, including God, the Good, First Cause, and so on, but his more frequent term, "One," is highly significant and intended to convey special prominence and meaning. The One is *causa sui*. It is ontologically unique and does not owe its existence to anything else. In this regard, it is unlike anything in the universe. At the same time, the One is the highest principle and progenitive source of all that exists. As Plotinus notes at *Enneads* 5.2.9—"The One, perfect because it seeks nothing, has nothing, and needs nothing, overflows as it were, and its superabundance makes something other than itself."[22] In attempting to explicate the process by which this prolific unfolding occurs, Plotinus employs language that must, perforce, rely upon simile, analogy, and metaphor. This is necessarily the case because, as we have already noted, the One is *epekeina ousia*—beyond being. In other words, the One enjoys a diremptive status that places it beyond anything in existence, including human imagination. It follows,

therefore, that no descriptive affirmation can adequately grasp the "otherness" of the One. It is fundamentally defiant of all predication — beyond references to quality, quantity, unity, motion, time and place. The complexities of communicating the nature of the One are further compounded by a seemingly inescapable need to rely upon paradox. For example, it is the source of all being but is itself beyond existence; it is the underived source of all that is derived; it is omnipresent throughout the universe but is absolutely transcendent; its astonishing fecundity is at once spontaneous and necessary. In the final analysis, then, the One must be accepted as an ineffable notion;[23] no language can adequately disclose the meaning or essence of the One.[24] To his great credit, Plotinus fully understands all this. He recognizes that the enigma surrounding the One comprises a mystery too deep and a power too vast for human comprehension. No incantation of word or mind can decode the riddle of this great unknown. In the end, it is only the mystic sojourner who stands a chance of lifting the veil on this mystery.

The second of the three Hypostases described by Plotinus is *Nous*, or intelligence. Upon its emergence from the godhead, *Nous* is little more than an unformed potentiality. But by turning back toward its source, Nous becomes fully formed and actualized. It is then both thought and object of thought combined, mind perfectly united with its object. As object, the cosmic *Nous* contains the world of forms or ideas famously presented in Plato's epistemology. Given their connection to intelligence, these paradigms are living, thinking entities. They will function as the eternal archetypes and causes by which the third province (Soul) will design and order the lower levels of reality. Needless to say, all of the capacities attributed to *Nous*, including the multiplicity of intelligible reality and the harmonic orchestration of the universe, can be traced back to the infinite fertility and potency of the One.

The final emanant, and the one most directly linked to human existence, is Soul (*psychē*). Soul is the product of *Nous* and serves as its *eikon*, or image. In turning toward its provenance, Soul becomes a fertile instrument whereby sensible reality is produced. As such, it is to be understood as the mediating force between the eternal forms contained in *Nous* and the realm of time, space, motion and sensibility. In short, Soul is the parent of nature. Within this scheme, Plotinus also distinguishes between two major gradations of Soul. On the one hand, there is the World Soul (*psyche tou pantos*), which maintains close affinities with *Nous*. At the same time, however, there is a portion of Soul that exists on the lower frontier of intelligible existence (*Enn*. 4.8.7). It is specifically this dimension of Soul that transmits being and order to the visible world, and it is at this level, too, that we may speak of individual human souls. Each human soul retains, according to Plotinus, a part that

remains turned toward the higher realm, just as the World Soul does (*Enn*. 4.3.12). Unlike the World Soul, however, human souls are not disembodied, and it is this fateful descent into matter (*hyle*) that enervates the natural vitality of soul. As we will see below, the desideratum of humanity is to purify and empower this undescended portion of soul. This alone, Plotinus argues, allows man to claim his birthright as a spiritual being.

Regarding the role and significance of matter, clearly Plotinus views physical reality in a strongly negative light. At the same time, however, he is not prepared to condemn matter in categorical terms. All reality, even the slag and dross of existence, is still traceable back to the benevolent and generous agency of the One. Therefore, Plotinus' alignment of matter with evil involves a series of carefully qualified premises that preclude the sort of simplistic dualism characteristic of the Gnostic movement.[25] As rusty as these material links may be, even matter remains part of the "Great Chain of Being," to use Lovejoy's famous phrase.[26]

With regard to these nuanced arguments, Plotinus begins with a critical distinction between two forms of matter — intelligible matter (*hyle noete*) and corporeal matter (*hyle aisthetos*). The former is a discrete and superior species capable of fully embracing the endowments of form, unlike the inferior capacities of physical matter: "The divine matter when it receives that which defines it has a defined and intelligent life, but the matter of this world becomes something defined, but not alive or thinking, a decorated corpse. Shape here is only an image; so that which underlies it is also only an image. But there [intelligible realm] the shape is true shape, and what underlies it is true too" (*Enn*. 2.4.5).[27]

In presenting this argument, Plotinus invokes a well-established and very ancient logic among the Greeks: that which is formless, that which is without quality or limit, is evil.[28] In assigning this status to sensible matter, Plotinus is not suggesting that matter represents a counter-force to divine goodness. Matter is never advanced by him as constituting a malignant metaphysical principle consciously opposed to the benefaction of the One. Instead, he argues that matter is evil in the following sense: "as a kind of unmeasuredness in relationship to measure, and unboundedness in relation to limit, and formlessness in relation to formative principle, and perpetual neediness in relation to what is self-sufficient" (*Enn*. 1.8.3). In short, matter is not an actively malicious substance. It is simply a manifestation of deficient reality explained by an incapacity to receive spiritual imprimatur properly. But how does Plotinus account for this deficiency?

In several of his treatises, Plotinus seems to argue that the cosmic conjugation resulting in the primary emanations, and eventually in matter, is actu-

ally several anomalous episodes. In speaking of Intellect's effluxion from God, for instance, he mentions how the cosmic mind "dares" to stand away from the One (*Enn*. 6.9.5). Similarly, in describing Soul's role in establishing time, he refers to a restless active nature "which wants to control itself and be on its own" (*Enn*. 3.7.11). Again, Plotinus notes how men wish to "belong to themselves" and delight in "their own independence" (*Enn*. 5.1.1). In all of these contexts Plotinus uses the term *tolma* or some closely related cognate. The word is of Neopythagorean origin and refers to the Indefinite Dyad and its self-assertive separation from the One. A reasonable English translation here would be "audacity." It would seem, then, that at some point in his intellectual evolution, Plotinus entertained the idea that "creation," including physical creation, was the product of impertinence, a deviant movement toward multiplicity and individuality. It is also clear, however, that there is another, more mature perspective that eventually becomes Plotinus' preferred position, which involves a concept of emanative necessity in conjunction with a theory of privation.

Under the terms of this final logic, Plotinus no longer views the formation of the material world as an act of defiant irrationalism. Rather, it is part of an inner instruction (*prothesmia*) or necessity reflecting the self-diffusive nature of the Good. In a manner of speaking, the realms of both *noesis* and *aisthesis* are disclosures of what might be called "the Principle of Plenitude."[29] In order to establish and affirm the perfection of the universe, no genuine potential of being can remain unfulfilled. The entire range of conceivable diversity must be exhaustively exemplified. Specifically, the extent and abundance of creation must be commensurate with its perfect and inexhaustible source — the One (Lovejoy 52).[30] This means that matter, too, is part (albeit a very low and amorphous part) of the Great Chain of Being. Its evil qualities are in no way equivalent to the iniquitous properties assigned matter by the Gnostics. For Plotinus, matter can be legitimately conceived of as evil only in the sense of deficiency or privation. Matter is evil in this sense because what the realm of sense receives in the process of its formation are merely the radiated images of the intelligible — not the intelligibles themselves. As a result, matter, for Plotinus, lacks the status of genuine reality. It exists at such a distance from the fount of being that it hovers at the outer limits of Plotinian ontology. As a result, Plotinus sees matter as a kind of non-being, a badly faded icon of noetic truth (*Enn*. 1.8.3). It remains forever a dark and raw substance incapable of integrating with form, and it is specifically this incapacity that qualifies matter for the designation "evil" (*Enn*. 2.4.16).[31]

One final note: The privation argument presented by Plotinus is not only an efficient means of explaining the position and status of corporeality within

the order of being, it is also a *de facto* theodicy. If in truth there is a fundamental affinity by which the entire universe is bound and all that exists is attributable to the One, then Plotinus needs to explain evil in a way that does not indict his good and all-powerful God. In this regard, his privation argument supplies a powerful exculpatory logic. Evil, in the form of corporeal existence, is not an opponent of divinity; it is simply the last and most extreme extension of the One's prolific energies. As such, it constitutes an inert and lifeless substance, a sort of counter-existence incapable of spiritual embrace. Evil, therefore, is not the result of God's inefficacy, much less his malefaction. Rather, evil is a factor of proximity — the more distant from the godhead, the more distant from the good.[32]

Human Nature

It goes without saying that Plotinus' assessment of physical matter has profound implications for humankind. In his eyes, man is an amphibious creature straddling two vastly different realms. On the one hand, he is indentured to a beguiling physicality where sense and shadow dictate the human horizon.[33] At the same time, however, there is a muted voice within man that beckons him to a higher and better place, a voice reminding him that, while he may be *in* this world, he is not truly *of* this world. To a very considerable extent, this distinction between the leaden existence of physical man and the inner urgings of pneumatic man bespeaks the central premise of Plotinus' entire philosophy — we are children of God who instinctively seek union with eternity and being. On what basis is Plotinus able to promote this proposition?

Here, again, Plotinus advances a view emphasizing the fundamental kinship extending throughout the entire universe. Notwithstanding the enormous variety and multiplicity of the sensible realm, Plotinus believes there lies within every human being a portion of the intelligible universe, an epitome of the cosmos that links us to the world above (*Enn.* 3.4.3). In other words, the universal is implicit in the particular, and it is specifically the human soul that reflects this universal element. Indeed, Plotinus argues that this divine spirit present in man is exactly the same soul associated with divinity because "all soul is present everywhere, made like to the father who begat it in its universality" (*Enn.* 5.1.2).[34]

Despite these lofty credentials, however, the human soul finds itself entombed in a fleshly prison. Under the eternal laws of the universe, this carnal descent was a necessary component of God's master "plan," and in that sense it cannot be seen as unjust or evil (*Enn.* 4.8.6). Still, this fusion of spirit

and matter represents a serious, and potentially devastating, challenge to humanity. Buried in the chaos and mire of the material realm, the human soul is subject to a kind of spiritual amnesia. Preoccupied with the concerns of the body, the soul not only forgets its noetic homeland, it also loses sight of the fact that spirit is the true cornerstone of human identity. Fortunately for our kind, there is the salvational opportunity represented by the undescended portion of the soul (*Enn*. 4.8). According to Plotinus, the welter of vapidities and seductions offered up in this life can neither stain nor misdirect this element of our being. Although most people remain unconscious of the connection, in truth, the undescended soul remains forever attached to the universal Intellect. And herein lies humanity's opportunity to undo the *kathados* (descent into matter) and achieve its return (*epistrophē*) to an immaterial province. As Plotinus explains (see below), this is done by enfranchising the "inner" man at the expense of the "outer" man (i.e., by an intellectual and moral purification that ignores the corrupting vanities of this world). It is through this purgative process that the spiritual component in man is refined and fortified, allowing the soul to grow its wings.[35]

Union with the One

The supreme mystical category for Plotinus is the One. It is both the *arche* and *telos* of existence, the source and the end of being. Despite this existential preeminence, however, the One remains *agnosia* (beyond knowing). Try as we might to label and categorize its essence, the One remains defiant of all description; it is best understood simply as the "not this" (*Enn*. 5.5.6). Accordingly, all attempts to comprehend the meaning and substance of the ineffable One must rely, however frustratingly, upon a series of incongruous designations that border on the oxymoronic — perfectly simple, yet perfectly manifold; in all things but not part of anything; the formless giver of all form, and so forth. These obscurities are not simply an affectation of the mystic's attempt to set himself apart from the ranks of the uninitiated. For Plotinus, the spiritual quest leading to "salvation" necessitates a complete transformation of routine cognitive activity. The Neoplatonic *spoudaios*, or wise man, must entirely revise his mental habits in a way that opens him to the possibility of receiving the One's bounty. Only by accomplishing this new mental and spiritual hygiene is one capable of returning to the fountainhead of existence.

At this point it is necessary to clarify Plotinian notions of salvation in an effort to distinguish them from those proffered by the Judeo-Christian tradition. While it is certainly the case that Plotinus understands the One as God, his portrait of divinity is radically distinct from Western religious perspectives.

For Jews and Christians alike, God is a benign and fatherly figure consciously concerned with the welfare of his children. As a gesture of divine generosity, God elects to involve Himself in the details of human history. He guides the Hebrews to the promised land and continuously delivers them from their enemies. Among Christians, divine involvement and concern is even more wondrous. Specifically, we are told of an extraordinary grace in the form of an incarnation. Here God benevolently takes on the burdens of the flesh on behalf of a stained humanity, including the agonies of a redemptive sacrifice. In so doing, "the chosen one" not only pays the debt owed for remission of sin, he also reestablishes a direct link, forged in love, between God and man.

In comparison to these images, Plotinus' portrait of the One seems pallid, remote, and mechanical. For one thing, Plotinus makes clear his belief that the One is entirely devoid of volition. Existence, including humanity, does not come into being via an act of divine will (i.e., the world was not created in the sense of the biblical description of Genesis). While it is true that the One is the universal efficient cause, the emanative process described by Plotinus is not an expression of God's concern or love for humanity. It is instead a logical consequence of the One's unique ontological status. More specifically, it is a kind of unconscious reflex indicative of divine profundity. The progression of being from its source is simply a case of superfecundity expressing itself.

Similar qualifications are in order as we consider the One's "goodness." For the faithful, God's goodness is exemplified in the guidance, mercy, and munificence he gratuitously extends his children. Even in the face of obstinate defiance, God remains steadfast in His willingness to rehabilitate and restore his children to righteousness. In short, God, in his benevolence, is an active agent in enabling humanity to secure a quality of life consistent with divine intent. None of these descriptions of a solicitous deity have much application in the philosophy of Plotinus. There is no question that Plotinus imputes "goodness" to the One, but this attribution is in no way analogous with our religious thought. The goodness Plotinus assigns his deity is unrelated to factors of generosity or loving concern. Rather, it is part of a longstanding tendency within Greek philosophy to associate goodness with perfection. In other words, the One is not "good" because God is anxious to relieve the human estate. He is good in the sense of being entirely self-caused and self-sufficient.[36] Indeed, not only does the One not will the procession of being that results in existence, but Plotinus' God is also entirely unconcerned with the products engendered by the emanative process. In the final analysis, we are still entitled to speak of a soteriological formula contained in the *Enneads*, but we must do so in terms that strongly distinguish the religious from a philosophical approach to salvation.

How, then, does Plotinus understand the mechanisms of man's deliverance? Based on the aforementioned premises, Neoplatonism, at least in its Plotinian version, discounts all intercessional strategies. Sacramentalism, in whatever form it is practiced, is useless in man's attempts to secure rescue from his alien state. No rite, no prayer, no ritual observance can ensure the active support of God on behalf of salvation. Above all, there is no allowance in the *Enneads* for any messianic intervention. Instead, Plotinus remains loyal to the rationalist traditions of Hellenism and maintains that "salvation" is first and foremost a human enterprise — as a rational animal, man is a uniquely auto-salvific creature. This can be said because the One is in all things (*Enn.* 5.2.1), including man, yet man alone possesses the intellectual and moral capacities capable of igniting the innate, divine embers into an all-illuminating flame.

A further point of demarcation between Plotinian and religious beliefs concerns the manner in which the *Enneads* describes salvation. Here, again, we need to prescind much of the redemptive imagery common to Christian theology.[37] In particular, there are few parallels for the paradisaic promises of the New Testament. Nowhere in the *Enneads* are we offered the promise of a second life free of burdens.[38] Instead, Plotinus restricts himself to assurances of spiritual tranquility and true well-being (*Enn.* 1.4.4–14). These tend to be the limits of Plotinian beatitude, and, significantly, they are based on a contemplative model, not providential grace. Specifically, they stem from an intellectual awakening to true human identity. What the majority of men and women fail to recognize is the double nature of personhood, the reality that each of us participates in an inner and outer existence (*Enn.* 1.4.14). To the exent, we neglect our inner essence in favor of external vanities such as offices, power, and riches (*Enn.* 6.7.34), we forfeit the opportunity to fulfill our noetic calling. This is an inevitable consequence of misguided anthropology, which mistakenly takes the imitation of existence for the reality (*Enn.* 6.9.9). It is imperative, therefore, that humanity be delivered from the kind of counterfeit life that impedes convergence with the fount of being. In short, we must create a situation where we can respond to the muted groans of our soul, where the mysterious longing for *henōsis* (union with the One) can be satisfied.

The process by which this return to "the Fatherland" is accomplished is typically understood as an ascent. In truth, however, it is better seen as a turning inward because no matter how deep our slumber, no matter how dim our apprehension of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, we remain divinely endowed. In general terms, recalling that which is highest and best within us involves the following sequence — purification, illumination, perfection and, eventually, union. In order to accomplish this progression of spiritual enhancements, we must cleanse ourselves intellectually and become living manifesta-

tions of *Nous*. At the same time, we must also acknowledge the inextricable bonds of wisdom and goodness. Those who covet the divine must also nourish the full range of virtues because "God, if you talk about him without true virtue, is only a name" (*Enn*. 2.9.15). Ultimately, the painstaking regime by which the Neoplatonic seer distinguishes himself results in a kind of meta-consciousness. Emptying himself of the normal activities of mind associated with discursive reasoning, the spiritual pilgrim wipes the cognitive slate clean. Unlike the Stoic sage, who is told he must remain engaged with the terrestrial city, Plotinus insists those seeking the One must detach themselves entirely from the impositions of this world. The objective, here, is the creation of a forgetful and reclusive soul removed from the distracting multiplicities of mundane existence. In effect, the soul must come to stand "alone."[39] This is so because only in quiet solitude can one anticipate the approach of God. Once the soul has been refashioned in this manner, the spirit traveler must patiently await the divine *parousia*.[40] Of course, there is never a guarantee in any of this. Even the most devoted individual can never compel godly presence. Yet those who have honestly engaged in the austere regimen set forth in the *Enneads*, those who have truly become "forgetful" of this life and mindful of the true self, are most likely to experience the supreme felicity.

In attempting to describe the mystical episode, Plotinus, of necessity, engages in a series of figurative descriptions, none of which can adequately convey this ineffable experience. Not surprisingly, one of his more compelling depictions involves the light metaphor, one of the most frequently employed images among the various mystical traditions. Here, he speaks of a surge of Intellect itself that fills the pilgrim's "eyes with light and does not make him see something else by it, but the light itself is what he sees. For there is not in that Good something seen and its light, nor intellect and object of intellect, but a ray which generates these afterwards and lets them be beside it" (*Enn*. 6.7.36).[41]

Such is the path of salvation prescribed by Plotinus. It reflects the paradoxic premise that finding the One is in fact an act of self-revelation. More, it suggests a journey whereby that which is merely mortal and transient is exchanged for that which is divine and eternal, the final result being an ecstatic "flight of the alone to the alone" (*Enn*. 6.9.9).[42]

The Plotinian Legacy

Given the spiritual tones of Neoplatonic philosophy, there is no surprise in learning of its potent influence upon a variety of religious traditions. As is well known, these influences were particularly pronounced in the case of

Christianity.[43] Indeed, no discussion of the interior life as understood by men such as Vitorinus, Augustine, Dionysius, the Cappadocian Fathers, Irenaeus, Athenasius, and Origen can neglect the pivotal role Neoplatonism played in shaping the Christian imagination. It is with good reason, therefore, that scholars believe, as W.R. Inge puts it, that Christian theology "is just Platonism applied to the interpretation of the beliefs of the first Christians."[44] While all this is undeniable, the fact remains that Christianity was not some passive medium that simply absorbed Plotinus without alteration. There were several key areas where biblical instruction was impossible to reconcile with the spirit and substance of the *Enneads*. Before tracing the Neoplatonic endowment to religion, therefore, it is first necessary to specify these critical zones of disharmony.

Few areas of disagreement are more profound or more significant than the differing views of human nature reflected in these two belief systems. For Neoplatonism, there is a fundamental kinship between man and the One in the sense that certain aspects of the human soul literally contain elements of God. Accordingly, divinity is an innate feature of human essence and we are therefore entitled to speak of the One and men's souls as connatural entities. However, given the fact that Christianity is the daughter religion of Judaism, the Neoplatonic tendency to identify a latent divinity within every human soul cannot be tolerated. Pantheism, to whatever degree it can be attributed to Neoplatonism, is an offense against the central premise of both Judaism and Christianity — monotheism. Christianity does speak of man's potential for divinization but this is not an opportunity humanity can claim as a kind of birthright. Rather, it comes as a gift extended to a fallen spirit who can never right his course in life without divine assistance. And herein lies the second major distinction between Christianity and Neoplatonism — the loving and merciful role of God.

As we have noted, the portrait of God offered in the *Enneads* is radically different from that presented by Judeo-Christianity. The One, according to Plotinus, is an impersonal God who remains entirely impassive toward everything that might be described as his ontological progeny. It is difficult, therefore, to think of him as the "father" of the universe. In fact, Plotinus explicitly states that God is completely unconcerned with existential categories and that he would not care if the entire universe had never existed (*Enn.* 5.5.12). In sharp contrast, Christianity speaks of a highly affiliated God with intimate concern for human welfare. Given man's negative (i.e., sinful) nature, he is incapable of attaining salvation by his own devices. In light of the fact that we cannot rise up, God generously descends to our level.[45] The supreme gesture by which God extends himself to humanity is, of course, the Incarnation,

and it is this philanthropic expression, more than anything else, that distinguishes Christianity from Neoplatonic thought.[46]

Having profiled some of the major distinctions between Christianity and Neoplatonism, we are now free to examine the many ways in which Plotinus and his followers impacted Christian spirituality. Perhaps the best way to accomplish this is to trace the influence along historical lines, starting with several major figures of the early church. To one degree or another, virtually all of the early church fathers relied upon Platonism as a key source of imagery, lexicon, and concept. This reliance is clearly seen in the case of the Cappadocian Fathers (late 4th century)—Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa. Plotinian influence is particularly evident in the case of Gregory of Nyssa (A.D. 329–389), who fully embraces the apophatic theology of Neoplatonism in speaking of a "divine darkness" and in his insistence upon the absolute incomprehensibility of God. In addition, he employs a variety of ironic tropes and metaphors reminiscent of the *Enneads*. Among these are his insistence that we can only come to "know" God by unknowing, that we must move beyond *zetetika dianoia* (discursive reasoning) in favor of a kind of "sober drunkenness." This reference to spiritual intoxication as an ironically superior state of mind has a ready and obvious counterpart in Plotinus (*Enn*. 6.7.35).[47]

Neoplatonism was also a powerful source of inspiration and insight for one of Western Christendom's major figures—St. Augustine (A.D. 354–430). It is certainly no secret that the *Enneads* were a decisive influence on both the intellectual and the religious development of Augustine. In addition to using the Neoplatonic conception of evil[48] as a vehicle to discredit Manichaean teachings, it is fair to say the defining elements of Augustinian theory were directly inspired by Plotinian thought (e.g., that the soul is independent of and superior to the body, that convergence with God involves a process of withdrawal and introspection, that the human soul's supreme aspiration is for mystical union with the divine, etc.). As a Christian, Augustine would eventually reject Neoplatonism's premise that salvation is attainable by human discipline alone—there could be no redemption, for Augustine, without the sacrifice at Golgotha.[49] Still, Augustine was fully prepared to acknowledge the profound affinities between Platonism and the young faith.[50]

The roster of those influenced by Neoplatonism also includes the Christian philosopher and statesman Boethius (A.D. 480–524). Best known for writing *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Boethius was particularly influenced by the Alexandrian brand of Neoplatonic thought. In his famous work, written during his imprisonment by the Gothic king Theodoric, Boethius offers a Platonic vindication of providence and, in the process, presents many of the central

themes of Neoplatonic instruction, including references to the perils of corporeal embroilment and the soul's natural inclination to seek the Good.[51] The *Consolation* was widely read in the medieval West, making Boethius one of the era's major educational forces. Chaucer translated the work into English in the 14th century, and soon thereafter translations appeared in German, French, Italian, and Spanish.

One of the more interesting figures on the list of those influenced by Neoplatonism is Dionysius the Areopagite, or Pseudo-Dionysius. The peculiar aspect of this individual's status as a transmitter of Neoplatonism lies in his identity. For many years it was assumed that this man was actually St. Paul's Athenian convert mentioned in Acts 17:34. Although some issue had been raised regarding this identification as early as the 6th century, generally speaking, the New Testament association was accepted until well into the 16th century.[52] In truth, we do not know the precise identity of the individual responsible for the *Corpus Areopagiticum*. We can, however, offer the following tentative conclusions. It is likely that the author was a Syrian Monophysite Christian who lived in the late 5th century A.D. His thought represents an amalgam of Christian and Neoplatonic elements, particularly the Proclean rendering of Neoplatonism. What we discover in the key Dionysian treatises (e.g., *The Divine Names*, *The Mystical Theology*, *The Celestial Hierarchy*) is a complete menu of virtually all the major themes in Neoplatonism, adjusted, of course, to accommodate Christian sensitivities. For example, *The Celestial Hierarchy* (177c) speaks of God as the universal cause that summons everything to communion with Him; *The Divine Names* (588b) presents in detail the chief features of Neoplatonic negative theology; and *The Mystical Theology* defines evil in traditional Neoplatonic terms (733c), speaks of the necessity of plunging the intellect into darkness (1033b) and asserts the impossibility of grasping the identity of God in any conventional manner (1048a).

In the year A.D. 862 an invaluable and historic service was rendered to Western culture by Eriugena (John Scotus), an Irish monk, who translated Dionysius into Latin. In so doing, Eriugena not only guaranteed his own status as a pivotal figure in the history of intellectual transmission, he also ensured a profound and enduring legacy for Neoplatonism. Over the centuries, Dionysius became a rich and definitive source of spiritual insight. Among the scholastic theologians, for example, he became an authoritative reference for the likes of Thomas Aquinas, who cites him some 1,700 times.[53] St. Bonaventure was similarly impressed, as indicated by his designation of Dionysius as the "Prince of Mystics." An even more definitive illustration of the depth and breadth of Dionysian influence is revealed by the list of thinkers who directly or indirectly drew upon this invaluable spiritual resource — Hugh of St. Victor,

Albert the Great, Nicholas of Cusa, St. John of the Cross, and Giordano Bruno, among others.[54]

The record also indicates that Neoplatonism's considerable impact upon leading European intellectuals was not restricted to medieval times. Indeed, one could argue that the era of classical rebirth known as the Renaissance was, to a considerable degree, inaugurated by those steeped in Neoplatonic doctrine. In the Byzantine east, Michael Psellus (1018–1079) saw to it that Neoplatonism was enshrined as a major element of the empire's higher learning. Psellus' admiration for Platonism had a powerful influence upon George Gemistus Pletho (1355–1452), a noted philosopher and a devoted follower of the Proclean interpretation of Neoplatonism. Among his achievements was the establishment of a Neoplatonic school at Mistra in the southern portion of mainland Greece. But by far his most important accomplishment lies in the role he played in the founding of the Florentine Academy. While attending the Council of Florence in 1438–1439, an attempt to heal the Great Schism of 1054, Pletho convinced Cosimo de' Medici of the necessity of such an institution. His efforts bore fruit with the opening of the Academy in 1462 under the leadership of Marsilio Ficino and associate scholars such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Francesco Cattani da Diacceto. Once established, the Academy rapidly took on the complexion of a Neoplatonic think tank. Not only was it responsible for the first complete translation of the entire Platonic corpus in any Western language, but the Academy also produced new Latin translations of the *Enneads* and a variety of other Neoplatonic texts. In the end, the Florentine Academy became one of Europe's foremost centers of learning, guaranteeing Neoplatonism's central role in the formation of Renaissance humanism as well as its enduring influence upon the West's idealist traditions.

It is hoped that the foregoing has convincingly demonstrated Neoplatonism's vital contributions in shaping Western religious and philosophical conventions. It now remains to trace the influence Plotinus and his followers exercised on non–Christian cultures — Islam and Judaism. Given current tensions between Islam and the West, it is easy to overlook the critical role Hellenic civilization played in the development of Muslim philosophy, science and theology. In truth, it is fair to say Greek thought, and particularly Neoplatonism, vigorously infused Islam with many of the same intellectual and spiritual elements it had earlier introduced into Christianity.[55] Of all the Greek metaphysical systems, none was better matched with Muslim attitude and disposition than Neoplatonism,[56] which explains why Islam had little hesitation in designating Plotinus *al-Shaykh al-Yūnānī*, "the Greek spiritual master."

In terms of intellectual transferal, the emperor Justinian played an inadvertent but key role in making Neoplatonic literature available to Islam. In A.D. 529 Justinian closed the Academy at Athens, leading several noted Neoplatonist philosophers to migrate eastward along with the manuscript materials of Plotinus, Porphyry and Proclus. Over time, the precise identity, demarcation and provenance of the texts became confused; as a consequence, Arab intellectuals routinely misassigned authorship. One of the more famous examples of this confusion is the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, which is in fact a series of paraphrases from the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth *Enneads*. The result was that a variety of well-known and historically significant Muslim thinkers such as al-Kindi, al-Farabi, Avicenna, and Averroes were errantly convinced they possessed legitimate examples of classical Greek thought. A similar case of misattribution involves the pseudo–Aristotelian text known in Arabic as *Kalam fi mahd al-Khair* (*Discourses on the Pure Good*) and in Latin as the *Liber de Caucis* (*Book of Causes*). Although this short work was less influential among Muslim philosophers than the *Theology of Aristotle*, when it was translated into Latin in the early 12th century by Gerard of Cremona, its impact was dramatic. Not only did it help shape the theology of Thomas Aquinas, it also became required reading at the University of Paris and a lively subject of commentary by a host of Christian thinkers, including Albertus Magnus, Roger Bacon, Siger of Brabant, and Giles of Rome. Again, this text had little to do with Aristotle and was in fact an Arabic translation/interpretation of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*. All of this leads to the ineluctable conclusion that many major medieval thinkers, both Muslim and Christian, arrived at their philosophical positions via the good offices of Neoplatonism.

Neoplatonic contributions to Islamic religious beliefs are more limited for the obvious reason that the Koran enjoys a normative authority among the faithful that no philosophical school or teaching can begin to approximate — ultimately, the ideas of Plotinus were no match for the inspired visions of the Prophet. Yet there were certain sects within Islam that were more open to Neoplatonic overtures, groups for whom aspects of the *Enneads* might be welcomed as a worthy supplement to a preexistenting, if rudimentary, spirituality. Perhaps the best example of this is the movement known as Sufism.[57] It should be noted that the foundations of this mystical form of Islam do not rest with Neoplatonism but are traceable to powerful otherworldly instincts among pious Muslims evident as early as the 8th century. For these devoted souls, life in this world was "a hut of sorrows," a painful wound that only a resolute commitment to God could heal. But these sentiments, an autochthonous feature of Islamic spirituality, proved a fertile ground for Neoplatonic instruction. By the end of its development as a theosophical system, Sufism

came to embrace many of the mystical premises promoted by the likes of Plotinus and Proclus. Among these were the following: that man was a microcosm of the larger universe; that God dwells within the human soul; that evil is a privation or absence of true being; that spiritual enlightenment requires mortification of the *nafs* (fleshy lusts); that the "Necessary Existent" (God) is the uncaused cause of all existence; and that the consummation of human existence lies in *bagā*, or union with the divine. These and many other points of convergence between Sufism and Neoplatonism suggest the latter's pivotal role in the mystical evolution of Islam.[58]

It is also the case that Neoplatonism played a significant part in shaping the mystical contours of Judaism. Some of the earliest and most substantive contacts between Greek and Jewish thought occured during the Hellenistic period (323 B.C.–31 B.C). Perhaps the best illustration of the resulting syncretism is the thought of Philo of Alexandria, who attempted to reconcile Platonic and Stoic philosophy with the religious prescriptions of the Torah. Among his most lasting achievements was the *logos* doctrine that became a central feature of Christian theology. Specific interactions between Judaism and Neoplatonism may have begun as early as the 5th century. It was at this time that Marinus, a Palestinian Jew, enrolled at the Academy and became the disciple of Proclus. He eventually went on to succeed his master as the school's director in 485. Another early point of contact between Judaism and Neoplatonism has been tentatively detected in the Hebrew esoteric text *Sefer Yetzira* (*Book of Creation*).[59] This book's particular significance lies in its presentation of the ten *sefirot*, or "powers," by which the Godhead is made manifest. The obvious similarity between the *sefirot* and the Neoplatonic system of emanations has led scholars to conclude that important elements of the *Sefer Yetzira* were influenced by the Proclean school of Neoplatonism.

The interactions between Judaism and Neoplatonism occurring during medieval times are both more numerous and more certain. As early as the 9th century we learn of Isaac ben Solomon Israeli, a physician and the individual generally acknowledged as the father of medieval Jewish Neoplatonism. Israeli had read the works of al-Kindi and was conversant with the *Theology of Aristotle*. In the 11th and 12th centuries many ideas among leading Jewish intellectuals revealed clear affinities with Neoplatonism. Key figures from this period include Dunah ibn Tamin, Solomon ibn Gabirol, Bahya ibn Paguada, and Abraham ibn Ezra.[60] Toward the end of the 13th century, the cabalist author Moses de Leon composed the seminal text *Zohar* ("radiance"). This well-known mainstay of Jewish mysticism mirrors many of the cardinal principles of Neoplatonism — indeed, it even includes direct citations from the *Theology of Aristotle*.[61] Among the many Neoplatonic premises that eventually

served as foundational themes for cabalism, the following are perhaps most significant: the unfolding (emanation) of the ten *sefirot* as revelation of God's inner life; the description of God as *Eyn Sof* (i.e., as boundless or infinite); the portrayal of the divine as *yitron*,[62] meaning "beyond being"; the idea that God defies all human attempts at comprehension; and the promise of *devekut*, the union or return of all things to the first cause.[63] By the 16th and 17th centuries, Neoplatonism was manifestly the preeminent source of cabalist doctrine throughout Europe.[64] Indeed, it has even been argued that the Plotinian legacy "played a significant role, if not dominant role, in the whole development of modern Jewish thought."[65]

Conclusion

In 1901–1902 William James offered the Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh. These noted remarks were eventually published in book form under the title *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. At several points in his analysis, James makes a distinction between two religious orientations — the once-born and the twice-born.[66] The first category represents a unit of humanity for whom this world is beautiful, harmonious and clement. God, in his great munificence, has created a nurturing environment where his children can freely live and prosper. Given the benignity of this earthly setting, the once-born are generally devoid of metaphysical aspiration. Their souls do not seek the beyond but are instead content to celebrate the opportunities of the here and now. On the other hand, there are the twice born who, unlike their once-born brethren, are not at peace with this world. These individuals are impelled by a spiritual longing that can never be truly satisfied by the ordinary rhythms of this life. On some level of their being, the twice-born perceive an imperfection in temporal existence. They sense a higher, otherworldly reality through which they can, and must, satisfy the deepest yearning of their souls. Among the twice-born, therefore, there is a strong renunciatory instinct. They are prepared to forsake this reality in favor of the abiding and the eternal.

In attempting to make sense of Neoplatonism's remarkable spiritual legacy,[67] it is instructive to consider the distinction drawn by William James. For a significant portion of humankind, Plotinian admonition will forever remain salient and compelling, because what Neoplatonism communicates is as close to a universal human message as any philosophy or religious teaching has ever achieved. It matters not, therefore, if one is a Christian, Jew, or Muslim. Neoplatonism presents a spiritual formula that ultimately transcends the routine parochialism of culture. It speaks profoundly and fundamentally to

every human being who has felt an inexplicable dissatisfaction with mundane existence and a corresponding wish, as William Blake said, to touch the sky with their finger. For these mislaid souls, Neoplatonism represents a great and enduring wisdom. To a degree unsurpassed by any other school of thought, Plotinian philosophy uniquely recognized that we are not merely creatures of appetite but also creatures of dreams, and that there are occasions when dreams embody a truth higher and better than anything sentient existence can offer. Thus, the reason why Neoplatonism has served as a kind of spiritual subtext for Western and non–Western cultures alike lies in its ability to evoke passion for the unitive life. For centuries, millions of "old" souls have found this life to be "a bad night in a bad inn," with the result that the allure of Plotinus' invitation to "return home" is simply irresistible.

Notes

1. Western mysticism, to the extent that it is traceable to Platonism, is different from Eastern mystical traditions in that it never abandons its rational foundations. The mystic's spiritual journey is always prefigured by a critical expansion of cognitive horizons. It is not a mysticism of irrationalism, occultism, or esotericism. In this regard, the distinctions between traditions drawn by R.C. Zaehner appear to be correct. See *Mysticism—Sacred and Profane* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957).

2. See R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), 160.

3. See E.R. Dodds, "Tradition and Personal Achievement in the Philosophy of Plotinus," in *The Ancient Concept of Progress* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 126–39.

4. The title of Plotinus' work is taken from the Greek word for "9." It reflects the organizational decision of Porphyry to group his master's treatises in six sets of nine essays each.

5. Ammonius remains a shadowy figure, but Porphyry does tell us that he was born a Christian, yet became so enamored of philosophy that he reverted to paganism, a premise contested by the 4th-century church historian Eusebius.

6. Porphyry explains that the relationship between Plotinus and the emperor was such that Gallienus would have established a "Platonopolis" under the philosopher's direction were it not for the jealous intercessions of various courtiers (*Life* 12.9).

7. Although Plotinus himself claims to have "woken up out of the body" on many occasions beyond the four instances observed by Porphyry (*Enn* 4.8.1).

8. Plotinus died at a friend's villa in Campania. The cause of death may have been leprosy.

9. The word "Neoplatonism" did not come into use until German scholars of the mid–19th century coined it.

10. The authenticity of these missives remains a point of scholarly debate among modern experts. In antiquity, however, these thirteen letters were generally accepted as genuine.

11. Plotinus also shows no hesitation in picking and choosing from among earlier thinkers. For example, he rejects Aristotle's categories as being in any way applicable to the intelligible realm, and while he endorses the Stoic notion of cosmic sympathy, he discards this school's material understanding of the world-soul as well as its belief that man's highest end is moral action in accord with Fate. For Plotinus, man's highest end is unity with the One.

12. The critical dialogues were *Republic*, *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Symposium*, *Timaeus*, and *Parmenides*.

13. The term *theourgia* literally means "divine work."

14. An apocryphal work written in the 2nd century A.D. allegedly containing the occult wisdom of the Orient.

15. Porphyry also began the process of incorporating Aristotelian thought into Neoplatonism, a procedure that reached its high point at Alexandria. In addition, Porphyry was an aggressive anti–Christian who developed methods of biblical criticism that were unmatched until modern times.

16. See Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, proposition 21, trans. T. Taylor (Frome, Somerset: Prometheus Trust, 1816).

17. From the Greek term *hen*, meaning "one." See Proclus, *Elements*, propositions 113–65.

18. See A.H. Armstrong, "Emanation in Plotinus," *Mind* 46 (1937): 61–66.

19. This according to Porphyry (*Life* 17), who is anxious to refute the charge.

20. Plotinus is fully aware of the incapacity of language to express many of his ideas. References to time, place, motion, and so on must be understood as metaphorical. They are not "realities," but rather logical descriptions of the order of being (see *Enn.* 5.1.6).

21. On the surface, many of the premises contained in Plotinus' metaphysics appear to conjoin seamlessly. There are, however, serious questions for which Plotinus does not, and perhaps cannot, offer any good answers. For example, how can the Hypostases be both transcendent and immanent simultaneously? How can the One function as a differentiated unity (i.e., how can it engender that which it does not contain)? Conceptual tensions such as these may be an inherent difficulty of any attempt to explicate mystical understanding.

22. Proclus (proposition 11) makes the same point: "There is a first cause of being from which as from a root everything proceeds."

23. See *Enneads* 5.2.13–14.

24. This acknowledgment that the mystery of the divine is beyond human understanding is the basis of what would later be called apophatic theology (i.e., negative theology). One of the earliest thinkers to advance this premise was Philo Judaeus (born c. 20 B.C.), who argued that we can never know God in his essence. Rather, we must be content to know him by his energies or works.

25. Plotinus offers an extended critique of Gnosticism in *Enneads* 2.9.

26. See A.O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973). The idea that matter was a necessary part of the coherent unity of the cosmos was rejected by Aristotle in *Metaphysics* (12.6.5), where he asserts it is not necessary that everything that is possible should actually exist.

27. A good illustration of this point is found in Plotinus' description of beauty. Here, he reminds us that the beauty we behold in physical bodies comes from elsewhere (*Enn.* 5.9.2). In a sense, earthly beauty is borrowed from above. It is never an intrinsic feature of material existence.

28. However, Plotinus violates this tradition when he describes the One as "infinite," a description he may be entitled to use given his insistence that the One is beyond all being and comprehension.

29. See Lovejoy, *Chain*, 52,

30. As Plotinus notes, the creative process "had to go on for ever, until all things have reached the ultimate possible limit [impelled] by the power itself, which sends them out and cannot leave anything without a share of itself" (*Enn.* 4.8.6).

31. Plotinus speaks of it in these terms: "want of thought, want of virtue, of beauty, strength, shape, form, quality."

32. This reasoning is taken up later by a variety of Christian thinkers, not the least of whom is St. Augustine (see below).

33. All strongly redolent of the cave environment described by Plato in Republic 514–17. See *Enneads* 4.8.3.

34. "But our soul is of the same kind, and when you look at it without its accretions and take it in its powerful state you will find that very same honourable thing which [we said] was soul, more honourable than everything which is body" (*Enn*. 5.1.2).

35. A famous image traceable to Plato's *Phaedrus* 255c–d.

36. We should remember, too, that the One is a thoroughly unpersonified conception of God. There is no possibility of equivalence here with the Judeo-Christian God, much less Christ. As a result, worship of the One is, in some fundamental sense, inconceivable.

37. But as we will see, a good portion of this imagery was itself shaped by Neoplatonism.

38. We should note, however, that Plotinus does seem to suggest a future, discarnate state in which the human soul will no longer be hindered by the body (*Enn*. 6.9.10).

39. In describing union with the One, Plotinus refers to a soul that is simple, single, calm, and devoid of emotion and desire (*Enn*. 6.9.10–11).

40. In describing the divine epiphany, Plotinus uses the Greek word *exaiphnes*, meaning "suddenly."

41. In another interesting description, Plotinus speaks of a divinely inspired dance: "And in this dance the soul sees the spring of life, the spring of the intellect, the principle of being, the cause of good, the root of the soul" (*Enn*. 6.9.9).

42. This "flight" involves the filling up of the human soul with God's presence. It is not an obliteration of the individual's identity but rather a merging of like with like. Plotinus was not a monist.

43. Even something as fundamental as the Christian Trinity may in fact reflect the triadic pattern of Neoplatonism: One = Father; Intellect = Son; Soul = Spirit.

44. See Inge's *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, 1948), 62–63.

45. Plotinus may be criticizing the Christians on this point at Enn. 3.2.9, where he states, "But it is not lawful for those who have become wicked to demand others to be their saviors and to sacrifice themselves in answer to their prayers."

46. Other areas of contention between Neoplatonism and Christianity include the latter's idea of *creatio ex nihilo*. For Neoplatonism, matter always existed and was not a willful act in time on God's part. In addition, Christian Trinitarianism came to reject the emanational scheme presented by Plotinus to the extent that it suggested a form of subordination (i.e., the inferior status of each subsequent link in the Great Chain of Being). The three persons of Christian Trinity had to be seen as strictly co-equal. This issue came to a head in the Arian controversy, which advocated a subordinate view of the Son, who was deemed divine by grace and not by nature. This view was rejected at Nicaea in A.D. 325, where the term *homoousios* was introduced to assert consubstantiality.

47. See A. Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition — From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 79.

48. That is, evil as privation, not as an overt counterforce to divine goodness.

49. As Augustine states in *On the Trinity* (13.19.24), "Our *scientia* and *sapientia* is Christ." In other words, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are to be found in Christ alone.

50. See *City of God* 8.9 and 10.2, and also *Confessions* 7.9.3 and 8.2.3.

51. See *The Consolation of Philosophy* 3.10.16, 3.12.49, 4.3.67, and 5.2.20–22.

52. Based on the testimony of Dionysius of Corinth, Eusebius claimed the Areopagite eventually became the first bishop of Athens. See *Ecclesiastical History* 3.4.11

53. See J. Pelikan, "The Odyssey of Dionysian Spirituality," in *Pseudo-Dionysius — The Complete Works*, trans. C. Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).

54. The author of the highly influential medieval text *The Cloud of Unknowing* was also among the legion of thinkers impacted by Pseudo-Dionysius. The work emphasizes

the well-established Neoplatonic theme that locating God and the true self requires a suspension of mind in favor of passion for the divine (see chapters 4, 5, and 8).

55. See R.A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), 13.

56. Franz Rosenthal notes that Shihāb-ad-dīn as-Suhrawardī, the great 12th-century mystic teacher, was fundamentally a Neoplatonist. See *The Classical Heritage in Islam*, trans. E.J. Marmorstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 145.

57. The term is derived from Arabic word *sūf*, meaning wool, a reference to the coarse woolen garments worn by these ascetics as a symbol of worldly renunciation. This style of dress was probably taken over from Christian anchorites living in Syria.

58. An excellent source for tracing the many areas of spiritual kinship between Neoplatonism and Sufism is the Nicholson text (1963).

59. The book appeared anonymously between the 2nd and 6th centuries A.D. and was subject to numerous interpolations thereafter.

60. The Jewish philosopher and physician Maimonides is typically referred to as an Aristotelian, but in fact he was also significantly influenced by Neoplatonism. His *Guide to the Perplexed* contains references to divine emanation and strongly asserts God's ineffable nature (see *Guide* 1.57, 1.58, and 1.59).

61. See R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), 166.

62. This Hebrew term is most likely a translation of the Neoplatonic word *hyperousia*.

63. These Neoplatonic adaptations were not without their difficulties. How does one justify, for example, the inclusion of a non–Jewish philosophical teaching in a faith uniquely endowed by the Sinaitic revelation? What is the need, or justification, for supplementing the direct word of God with Greek rationalism? And how does one reconcile revelation with apophaticism? How can one speak of "revealing" that which represents impenetrable mystery? Regarding the first question, Judaism's strategy was one of creative incorporation, a process that can be traced as far back as Aristobulus (2nd century B.C.), who fancifully employed allegorical interpretation to argue that Greek philosophy was derived from Judaism. These ideas continued into modern times, when, for example, Issac Abravanel (1437–1508) insisted that Plato studied in Egypt under the prophet Jeremiah and Leone Ebreo (1460–1521) who claimed Plato as a disciple of ancient cabalists. Concerning the inconsistency of attempting to affirm that which is beyond human comprehension, Judaism calls upon a mechanism common to virtually all mystical traditions, including Neoplatonism — analogical predication. Given the deficiencies of human language, this expedient constitutes the only available option.

64. See M. Idel, "Jewish Kabbalah and Platonism in the Middle Ages and Renaissance," in *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, ed. L.E. Goodman (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 325.

65. B. Harris, preface to *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, xi.

66. He derives these categories from F.W. Newman's *The Soul, Its Sorrows, and Its Aspirations* (London: J. Chapman, 1852), 89–90.

67. Although this chapter has focused almost exclusively upon the spiritual endowment of Neoplatonism, much could also be said regarding its philosophical and literary contributions to Western culture. For example, Spinoza, Leibniz, Schelling, Hegel, and Bergson were each, in various ways, influenced by Neoplatonism. The same is true for poets such as Blake, Coleridge, Shelley, and Yeats. American Transcendentalists, such as Emerson and Thoreau, are also among those indebted to Plotinus and his followers.

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