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Popular Philosophy in the Hellenistic-Roman World

Die philosophischen Traditionen der hellenistisch-römischen Zeit haben verschiedene gemeinsame Merkmale: die Betonung der Ethik; die Tendenz Lehren und Ideen aus verschiedenen Quellen auszuwählen; der Fokus auf der moralischen Entwicklung des Individuums; psychagogische Prinzipien und Praktiken um spirituelle Reife zu fördern; schließlich die Tendenz philosophische Ideen populär zu machen. Drei Texte – die Goldenen Verse des Pythagoras, der Zeushymnus des Kleanthes sowie „De Mundo“ von Pseudo-Aristoteles – illustrieren diese den verschiedenen Traditionen gemeinsamen Charakteristika.

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I. Introduction

Although the terms 'philosophy' and 'philosophers' occur only once each in the New Testament (Col 2:8; Acts 17:18) and the former in a rather negative context as well, it is reasonable to assume more widespread knowledge of philosophical ideas and practices among several New Testament authors than this limited use of the terms may lead us to expect.¹ Such an assumption is supported by the fact that contemporary Hellenistic-Jewish authors such as Pseudo-Phocylides, the author of the *Wisdom of Solomon* and Philo of Alexandria also engaged with philosophical traditions to a greater or lesser extent. From the second century onwards, we indeed find extensive evidence for the kind of dialogue between Christianity and philosophy adumbrated in Acts 17, beginning with the apologists

¹ It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss such knowledge, but the brief recent overview by D.T. Runia, "Ancient Philosophy and the New Testament: 'Exemplar' as Example", in *Method and Meaning: Essays on New Testament Interpretation in Honor of Harold W. Attridge* (ed. by A.B. McGowan and K.H. Richard; Atlanta 2011) 347–361, provides useful pointers. See also G.E. Sterling, "Hellenistic Philosophy and the New Testament", in *Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament* (ed. by S.E. Porter; NTTS 25; Leiden 1997) 313–358.

and apocryphal acts until it reached its full development in authors like Clement of Alexandria.

The present article will not however consider the possible indebtedness of early Christianity to Hellenistic-Roman philosophies. It will instead focus on those features of Hellenistic-Roman philosophies that in my view may be of interest when we want to understand early Christianity within its broader intellectual and cultural context. What is proffered here is therefore a personal perspective, rather than a comprehensive overview.²

II. General Characteristics

A considerable number of philosophical traditions were still active during the early Roman empire. One may distinguish between Platonism, Aristotelianism, Cynicism, Scepticism, Epicureanism, Stoicism, and Pythagoreanism, but most of them shared several general characteristics. In this section I will attempt to identify some of these commonalities, before

² There are several useful recent introductions and surveys of Hellenistic-Roman philosophies: A.A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* (2nd ed.; Berkeley and Los Angeles 1986); H. Flashar (ed.), *Die hellenistische Philosophie*, vol. 4 of *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie: Die Philosophie der Antike* (Basel 1994); R.W. Sharples, *Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics: An Introduction to Hellenistic Philosophy* (London 1996); K. Algra et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* (Cambridge 1999); J. Brunschwig and D. Sedley, "Hellenistic Philosophy", in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Philosophy* (ed. by D. Sedley; Cambridge 2003) 151–183; A.A. Long, "Roman Philosophy", in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Philosophy* (see above) 184–210; B. Inwood (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics* (Cambridge 2003); R.W. Sharples and R. Sorabji (eds.), *Greek and Roman Philosophy 100 BC–200 AD* (2 vols.; BICS Supplement 94; London 2007). For source books see A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (2 vols.; Cambridge 1987); B. Inwood and L.P. Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings* (2nd ed.; Indianapolis 1997); R.W. Sharples, *Peripatetic Philosophy 200 BC to AD 200: An Introduction and Collection of Sources in Translation* (Cambridge 2010). Valuable from the perspective of New Testament scholarship: Sterling, "Hellenistic Philosophy and the New Testament" (see n. 1); H. Rosenau, "Hellenistisch-römische Philosophie", in *Weltauffassung, Kult, Ethos*, Vol. 3 of *Neues Testament und Antike Kultur* (ed. by J. Zangenberg et al.; Neukirchen-Vluyn 2005) 1–21; R. Hirsch-Luipold et al. (eds.), *Religiöse Philosophie und philosophische Religion der frühen Kaiserzeit: Literaturgeschichtliche Perspektiven. Ratio Religionis Studien I* (STAC 51; Tübingen 2009). Still very useful for their programmatic statements: A.J. Malherbe, "Graeco-Roman Religion and Philosophy and the New Testament", in *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters* (ed. by E.J. Epp and G.W. MacRae; Atlanta, GA 1989) 3–26; id., "Hellenistic Moralists and the New Testament", *ANRW* II.26.1 (1992) 267–333.

moving on to a few texts in which some of these characteristics are exemplified.

One of the most obvious features is that philosophy has either an ethical-pragmatic or an exegetical focus.³ From the former perspective philosophy is viewed as a way of life (*Lebenskunst*) that informs everything one did and that is practiced in order to attain a happy and fulfilled existence.⁴ Thus Cicero states that “all teachings of philosophy have to do with life” (*omnia philosophiae praecepta referuntur ad vitam*; Nat. Deor. 1.7), while Seneca calls philosophy “the law of life” (*vitae lex*; Ep. 94.39); “it moulds and constructs the soul; it orders our life, guides our conduct, shows us what we should do and what we should leave undone; it sits at the helm and directs our course as we waver amid uncertainties” (*animum format et fabricat, vitam disponit, actiones regit, agenda et omittenda demonstrat, sedet ad gubernaculum et per ancipitia fluctuantium derigit cursum*; Ep. 16.3, trans. by R.M. Gummere in LCL). This emphasis on ethics does not obviate the need for knowledge of other, more technical subjects such as dialectic and rhetoric, or physics, but these are mainly required in as much as they provide a foundation for the moral life.⁵

The exegetical approach is characteristic of the Peripatetic tradition in particular, especially after the renewed edition of the works of Aristotle by Andronicus of Rhodes in the second half of the first century BCE, but it is also common among Platonists of this period. According to this approach, philosophy takes as its point of departure a text written by the master (i.e. Plato or Aristotle). Exposition of an authoritative text entails more than just an attempt to arrive at orthodox positions on various doctrinal mat-

3 P. Hadot, “Philosophie I. E. Hellenismus”, *HWPh* 7 (1989) 592–599, at 592f, distinguishes these as two phases in the development of Hellenistic philosophy, but both phases coincide during the first two centuries of the Imperial period: the ethical-pragmatic phase extends from the 4th century BCE through the end of the 2nd century CE; the exegetical phase from the end of the 1st century BCE till the end of the 3rd century CE. A third, mystical-theurgical phase, falls outside the scope of this article; it begins in the 3rd century CE and continues until the end of antiquity.

4 This has been emphasized in recent years by P. Hadot, among others; see *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (ed. by A.I. Davidson, trans. by M. Chase; Oxford 1995); id., *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (trans. by M. Chase; Cambridge, MA 2002). See also A.A. Long, “Hellenistic Ethics as the Art of Life”, in *From Epicurus to Epictetus: Studies in Hellenistic and Roman Philosophy* (Oxford 2006) 23–39 (as well as the telling subtitle of his excellent study *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* [Oxford 2002]); R.W. Sharples, “Philosophy for Life”, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Hellenistic World* (ed. by G.R. Bugh; Cambridge 2006) 223–240.

5 For the division of philosophy into various parts and their interrelationship, see P. Hadot, “Philosophie I. F. Die Einteilung der Philosophie in der Antike”, *HWPh* 7 (1989) 599–607.

ters, however; working through the thought of Plato or Aristotle in such a text enables the philosopher to advance in his or her own journey towards spiritual maturity.⁶ Intense interaction with an authoritative text can therefore also form part of the psychagogical process (see below).

A second characteristic is the fact that philosophers frequently selected and combined elements from more than one philosophical tradition when formulating their own position. Philosophy in the Hellenistic-Roman period is therefore often considered eclectic. Posidonius, for example, incorporated elements of both Platonism and Aristotelianism into his Stoic framework; Philo of Alexandria used both Platonic and Stoic doctrines in developing his own synthesis; Cicero and Seneca both brought together material from various sources, as did Galen. The use of the term eclecticism as a description of such philosophies has however increasingly been questioned in recent years.⁷ In a forthcoming publication Elizabeth Asmis tentatively suggests that much of the philosophy in the period from Antiochus of Ascalon to Galen can be characterized as *personal philosophy*, instead, as an analogy to the idea of personal religion.⁸ By personal philosophy she means “the adaptation of previous systems of philosophy to one’s personal needs”. According to Asmis, personal philosophy is associated with four features: (a) It is *critical* in the sense that every part of the tradition is assessed critically; it is not accepted simply because of the authority of the tradition. (b) It is *far-ranging* because a person considers a wide range of positions, in principle the whole of antiquity, and does not confine him- or herself to just one tradition or period. (c) It is *constructive* because it sets up a system of truths based on personal experience and logic while recognizing limits to the discovery of truths. (d) It is finally *integrated* with all aspects of one’s life and not something separate from other activities.⁹ This means, for example, that it is less important to determine

6 Hadot, “Philosophie I. E. Hellenismus” (see n. 3), 596f.

7 See J.M. Dillon and A.A. Long (eds.), *The Question of “Eclecticism”: Studies in Later Greek Philosophy* (Berkeley 1988); J.M. Dillon, “Eclecticism”, *OCD*, 502; M. Frede, “Eklektizismus”, *DNP* 3.937f; E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (3rd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI 2003) 379–382 (with special reference to Cicero).

8 E. Asmis, “Galen’s *Peri alupias* and the Idea of a ‘Critical Philosophy’”, in *Galen’s De indolentia: Selected Essays* (ed. by C.K. Rothschild and T.W. Thompson; Tübingen forthcoming); first presented in the Corpus Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti Section at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, San Francisco, 19 November 2011. I am grateful to Professor Asmis for kindly sending me a draft version of the article. The concept of personal religion goes back to A.J. Festugière, *Personal Religion Among the Greeks* (Sather Lectures 26; Berkeley and Los Angeles 1954). See also Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (see n. 7), 213–251, 325.

9 Asmis, “Galen’s *Peri alupias* and the Idea of a ‘Critical Philosophy’” (see n. 8).

whether Philo of Alexandria should be considered a Platonist or a Stoic; one should rather focus on the way he used these various traditions in constructing his own thought. Similarly, merely identifying the sources used by someone like the author of the *De mundo* is of limited value; one should instead try to determine how the author interacts with his sources in the composition of his text (more on this text below).

A further noted characteristic of philosophy in this period is its tendency towards individualism. Philosophy focused on the moral progress and ethics of the individual rather than that of society.¹⁰ The emphasis was on how the individual could achieve an integrated and peaceful existence and be self-sufficient despite the inquietude and uncertainties of his social environment; there was less interest in developing an ethics built on social responsibilities. This did not mean that social duties and responsibilities could be ignored, but they derived from the individual's natural embeddedness in society and his or her natural inclination to other humans as expressed in family ties or friendships. The individual's self-interest required that social roles be taken seriously, but the focus remained self-interestedness.¹¹

A fourth common thread is the emphasis on psychagogy or moral-spiritual guidance. The focus on ethics and attaining moral maturity created a system of care consisting of principles, disciplines and practices that support the philosopher's advancement towards moral maturity. Although the term *ψυχαγωγία* is found in antiquity, it is predominantly used of the power of rhetoric or music to move the soul;¹² the meaning 'moral, spiritual guidance' is a neologism that has become especially popular within New Testament Studies following the groundbreaking work by Abraham Malherbe on Paul's pastoral care.¹³ Among classicists the terms 'spir-

¹⁰ Cf. e.g. the primacy Epictetus assigns to training one's desires and aversions (Diatr. 3.2.1); see Long, *Epictetus* (see n. 4), 112–115.

¹¹ Epictetus again provides an excellent example; see Long, *Epictetus* (see n. 4), 115f, 197–201. For a sophisticated critique of what he calls the subjective-individualist reading of Epictetus and other Hellenistic-Roman philosophers see C. Gill, *The Structured Self in Hellenistic and Roman Thought* (Oxford 2006), 325–407.

¹² Cf. Plato, *Phaedr.* 261a8, 271c10. See also LSJ, s.v.

¹³ A.J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophic Tradition of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia 1987); id., *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis 1989); id., "Hellenistic Moralists and the New Testament" (see n. 2), esp. 301–304. See also C.E. Glad, *Paul and Philodemus: Adaptability in Epicurean and Early Christian Psychagogy* (NovTSup 81; Leiden 1995).

itual' or 'moral guidance' (*Seelenführung* or *Seelenleitung* in German) are still commonly used.¹⁴ According to Ilsetraut Hadot,

"All Hellenistic and Imperial schools of philosophy, including the Cynics and Skeptics, regarded guidance toward a happy life as the most important goal of their philosophy. What was understood by happy life could vary considerably in theory, but in all cases it had the practical end of strengthening the individual inwardly against all the vicissitudes of fate and, as far as possible, of making the person self-sufficient. Ancient philosophy was, above all, help with life's problems and spiritual guidance, and the ancient philosopher was, above all, a spiritual guide."¹⁵

Such guidance was two-dimensional; one may approach it either from the perspective of the teacher as guide or from the student as practitioner of the principles involved:

"In the case of the former, the focus is on the teacher's responsibilities, on procedures to be followed in guidance, on considerations to be kept in mind so as not to discourage the student, on the potential assistance given by fellow-students, and so forth.¹⁶ In the case of the student, psychagogy has to do with the principles the student has to internalize and apply in his life, and the various practices and exercises he has to perform to mature morally and spiritually. Such exercises include memorizing precepts in order to be able to apply them when the need arises, meditation, predeliberation, and self-examination. To assist him in his growth, the teacher or spiritual community provide him with instructive material such as elementary introductions, *ἐπιτομαί* (*résumés*), and sayings. Although the process is set into motion by a teacher-guide, the student is expected to continue on his own, using the exercises and texts provided by the teacher."¹⁷

Despite the strong individualistic focus of philosophy in this period, the development of the self thus relied on a social context to be most effective.

Finally, there is a tendency towards popularization of philosophical ideas, which meant that educated laymen knew some of the shared concepts without necessarily having detailed knowledge of the technical dif-

¹⁴ The classic study is P. Rabbow, *Seelenführung: Methodik der Exerzitien in der Antike* (München 1954). Other important studies include I. Hadot, *Seneca und die griechisch-römische Tradition der Seelenleitung* (Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Philosophie 13; Berlin 1969); id., "The Spiritual Guide" (trans. by M. Kirby), in *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman* (ed. by A.H. Armstrong; World Spirituality 15; New York 1986) 436–459; Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (see n. 4). See also the summary, with more references, in J.C. Thom, *The Pythagorean Golden Verses: With Introduction and Commentary* (RGRW 123; Leiden 1995) 77–79. Also concerned with the broader topic: M.C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton 1994); R. Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Emotion* (Oxford 2000).

¹⁵ Hadot, "The Spiritual Guide" (see n. 14), 444.

¹⁶ Philodemus, *Περὶ παρηγορίας* discusses the role of fellow-students in detail; see on this also the brief summary by Hadot, "The Spiritual Guide" (see n. 14), 455.

¹⁷ Thom, *Golden Verses* (see n. 14), 78f.

ferences between the schools.¹⁸ This process was promoted by the existence of popular philosophical texts which were perhaps used to attract students to the various philosophical schools. In the rest of the article I want to consider a few of these texts. These texts are discussed by way of example only; they are not meant to be representative of Hellenistic-Roman philosophy as a whole.

III. Popular Philosophical Texts

1. The Pythagorean *Golden Verses*

Although the date of composition of the Pythagorean *Golden Verses* remains uncertain,¹⁹ the text was very well known from the end of the first century BCE onward. Verses from the hexameter poem are quoted or alluded to by a variety of Stoic, Platonic, Neopythagorean, Sceptic, Christian, and other authors. These include Cicero, Seneca, Plutarch, Epictetus, Aëtius, Nicomachus of Gerasa, Theon of Smyrna, Lucian, Aulus Gellius, Galen, Clement of Alexandria, Sextus Empiricus, Origen, Hippolytus of Rome, Diogenes Laertius, and Porphyry.²⁰ The poem originated in Pythagorean circles but its widespread popularity was undoubtedly due

18 See Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (see n. 7), 323–325. On popular philosophy (*Popularphilosophie*) see further K. Ziegler, “Plutarchos von Chaironeia”, PW 21.1 (1951) 636–962; L. Van der Stockt, “*Semper duo, numquam tres?* Plutarch’s *Popularphilosophie* in *On Having Many Friends*”, in *Virtues for the People: Aspects of Plutarchan Ethics* (ed. by G. Roskam and L. Van der Stockt; Plutarchea Hypomnemata; Leuven 2011) 19–39; C. Pelling, “What is Popular about Plutarch’s ‘Popular Philosophy’?”, in *Virtues for the People* (see above), 41–58; also M.-O. Goulet-Cazé, “*Popularphilosophie*”, DNP 10.154f.

19 I have argued elsewhere that the poem should be dated towards the end of the 4th century BCE (Thom, *Golden Verses* [see n. 14], 35–58; id., “Cleanthes, Chrysippus and the Pythagorean *Golden Verses*”, *Acta Classica* 44 [2001] 197–219), but most scholars prefer a date around the 1st century CE; cf. e.g. A. Dihle, *Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire* (trans. by M. Malzahn; London 1994) 82. A detailed commentary as well as a critical text and translation may be found in Thom, *Golden Verses* (see n. 14); quotations are from this publication.

20 Cf. Cic., *Sen.* 38; *Sen.*, *Dial.* 5.36.1–4; *Plut.*, *Cons. Apoll.* 29.116e; *Superst.* 7.168b; *Curios.* 1.515f; *frg.* 86 Sandbach (= scholia on Hesiod, *Op.* 707–708); [*Plutarch*] *Vit. Poes. Hom.* 153; *Epict.*, *Diatr.* 3.10.2–3; 4.6.32–35; Aëtius 1.3.8; Nicomachus in *Theol. Arithm.* 18, p. 22.20–22; Theon of Smyrna, *Expos. Rer. Math.*, p. 94.4–6; Lucian, *Vit. Auct.* 4; Aulus Gellius, *Noct. Att.* 7.2; Galen., *Affect. Dignot.* 5.10; 6.10; *Clem.*, *Paed.* 1.10.94.1; Sextus Empiricus, *Math.* 4.2; 7.94; Origen, *frg.* in *Ps.* 4:5; Hippol., *Haer.* 6.23.4; *Diog. Laert.* 8.22; Porphyry., *Vit. Pyth.* 20, 40. See also the discussion in Thom, *Golden Verses* (see n. 14), 37–43.

to the fact that there is very little specifically Pythagorean in the poem: apart from a reference to the so-called Pythagorean oath in vv. 47–48a²¹ we find only a vague command to abstain from unspecified foods in v. 67 (although this is balanced by precepts recommending moderation in eating and drinking in vv. 10, 32–34), a reference to Pythagorean-Orphic sounding books called *Purifications* and *Deliverance of the Soul* in vv. 66f, and a quotation from the ‘Pythagorean’ Empedocles in v. 71, but these elements were apparently not considered an obstacle by non-Pythagoreans.

The fact that the poem combines ideas and strands of thought that would have been familiar to readers coming from different traditions probably contributed to its popularity.²² In addition to the Pythagorean elements just mentioned, the author makes extensive use of gnostic wisdom traditions. The emphasis on moderation (vv. 9–11, 32–34, 37f) sounds like the Academic-Peripatetic doctrine of *metriopatheia*,²³ while the schema of cardinal virtues underlying vv. 9–20²⁴ as well as the reference to the faculty of judgment as charioteer in v. 69 are reminiscent of Plato. The practice of self-examination (vv. 27–44) was recommended by Stoics and Epicureans, but later became common to all traditions. The notion of an essence (οὐσία) common to gods and humans which pervades and rules everything (vv. 50f) would have seemed familiar to a Stoic, as would the idea of the universal interrelatedness of all things in v. 52, although a similar formulation is already found in Plato, *Meno* 81d. In the immediately following verses (54–58) the statement that human suffering is self-incurred (αὐθαίρετα) is an ancient concept,²⁵ but the for-

21 ναὶ μὰ τὸν ἀμετέρῃ ψυχῇ παραδόντα τετρακτὺν, / παγὰν ἀενάου φύσεως; ‘yes, by him who imparted to our soul the *tetraktys*, / fount of ever-flowing nature’. The *tetraktys* (‘unit of four’) was the name the Pythagoreans gave to the first four numbers, whose sum makes up 10, and which was supposed to have all kinds of symbolic and metaphysical significance. The doctrine of the *tetraktys* was attributed to Pythagoras, the founder of the Pythagorean tradition. See Thom, *Golden Verses* (see n. 14), 171–177; C. Riedweg, *Pythagoras: Leben, Lehre, Nachwirkung: Eine Einführung* (München 2002) 110f.

22 For the correspondences between the *Golden Verses* and other philosophical traditions see Thom, *Golden Verses* (see n. 14), 46–57, as well as the commentary in that work on the verses cited below.

23 We find both *metriopatheia* and *apatheia* in various Hellenistic-Roman Pythagorean texts; see J.C. Thom, ‘The Passions in Neopythagorean Writings’, in *Passions and Moral Progress in Greco-Roman Thought* (ed. by J.T. Fitzgerald; London 2008) 67–78.

24 See on the cardinal virtues in these verses also J.C. Thom, ‘“The Mind is Its Own Place”: Defining the *Topos*’, in *Early Christianity and Classical Culture: Comparative Studies in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (ed. by J.T. Fitzgerald et al.; NovTSup 110; Leiden 2003) 555–573, at 571f.

25 Cf. the references in LSJ, s.v. αὐθαίρετος.

mulation in these verses is such that the Stoics Cleanthes and Chrysippus both probably made use of it.²⁶

It is important to note, however, that although the poem makes use of a variety of ideas and traditions, there is an evident attempt to present this material as a coherent whole.²⁷ The first part of the poem (vv. 1–49a) focuses on ethics: starting from the set of relationships to be cultivated (with the gods and other superior beings, vv. 1–3; one's family, v. 4; and friends, vv. 5–8), the poem goes on to give precepts for practicing virtue. These include precepts concerning the cardinal virtues (vv. 9–20), moral insight and the power of speech (vv. 21–26), and deliberation and reflection (vv. 27–44). The second part of the poem (vv. 49b–71) is concerned with cosmology: it promises insight into the relationship between gods and humans, into nature, and into the cause of suffering (vv. 50–64). After a few assurances and reminders about practicing the precepts, the poem ends with the promise of divine immortality (vv. 70f). Ethics and cosmology are interrelated: practicing the way of life outlined in the poem is a prerequisite for understanding one's position within the cosmos and will eventually lead to the goal of becoming divine.

The significance of the *Golden Verses* finally lies in the way it functioned within a psychagogical program, as is also borne out by various ancient testimonia about the way the poem was used.²⁸ The poem lays out the moral principles to be applied in one's relationships to others and in everyday life (vv. 1–39, 67–69); it provides a set of practices such as deliberation before action, reflection, and self-examination (vv. 27–44), all of which contribute to conscious and rational behavior; it emphasizes the importance of regular practice to master the precepts (vv. 9, 45–49, 65); and it helps the student to understand the broader cosmological context within which the prescribed life has to be practiced in order to attain full spiritual maturity (vv. 50–71). Although aware of the social and communal dimensions of the student's actions (cf. vv. 1–8, 21–26, 67f), the psychagogy of the poem ultimately focuses on the individual's personal moral progress.

²⁶ For the probable dependence of Cleanthes and Chrysippus on these verses, see Thom, "Cleanthes, Chrysippus and the *Golden Verses*" (see n. 19).

²⁷ The composition of the poem is discussed in Thom, *Golden Verses* (see n. 14), 59–68.

²⁸ Thom, *Golden Verses* (see n. 14), 38–43, 77–81.

2. Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*

The *Hymn to Zeus* by the Stoic philosopher Cleanthes was probably composed sometime during the first half of the third century BCE.²⁹ Although there may be a few uncertain allusions to the *Hymn* in authors like Aratus (ca. 315 to before 240 BCE), Arius Didymus (1st century BCE), Cicero (106–43 BCE), Lucretius (ca. 94–51? BCE), Manilius (beginning of the 1st century CE), and Musonius Rufus (before 30 to before 101/2 CE),³⁰ the only certain ancient testimony is the quotation of the text in Stobaeus's *Anthology* (1.1.12) dating from the early fifth century CE. The *Hymn to Zeus* is however an excellent example of a popular philosophical text and it may have been the kind of text known to the author of Acts (cf. 17:28).³¹

A remarkable feature of the *Hymn* is its relative lack of explicit technical, Stoic terminology. There are only two phrases that an ancient reader may have identified as Stoic, namely the reference to “the universal reason, which permeates everything” (κοινὸν λόγον, ὃς διὰ πάντων φοιτᾷ, vv. 12f) and to the “universal law” (κοινὸς νόμος, vv. 24, 39). This does not mean that there are no other Stoic concepts at work in the text, but rather that the text would have been accessible to someone without detailed knowledge of Stoicism. Much of it could indeed have been understood on two levels: either as traditional material, or as an expression of Stoic thought.³² Although we know nothing of the poem's original *Sitz im*

²⁹ Cleanthes himself lived from 331/30 to 230/29 BCE, but it is uncertain when in his career the *Hymn* was written; see J.C. Thom, *Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (STAC 33; Tübingen 2005) 2–7. Quotations of the text and translation of the *Hymn* are taken from this publication.

³⁰ Thom, *Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus* (see n. 29), 52 n. 51, 61, 65, 66; id., “Doing Justice to Zeus: On Texts and Commentaries”, *Acta Classica* 48 (2005) 1–21, at 4f.

³¹ See J.C. Thom, “Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus* and Early Christian Literature”, in *Antiquity and Humanity: Essays on Ancient Religion and Philosophy Presented to Hans Dieter Betz on His 70th Birthday* (ed. by A.Y. Collins and M.M. Mitchell; Tübingen 2001) 477–499, at 479f.

³² See the examples discussed in Thom, *Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus* (see n. 29), 20–27. G. Zuntz, *Griechische philosophische Hymnen* (ed. by H. Cancik and L. Käppel; STAC 35; Tübingen 2005), 39, also recognizes the existence of two complementary levels in the poem. In an important article responding to my book (see n. 29) E. Asmis, “Myth and Philosophy in Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*”, *GRBS* 47 (2007) 413–429, accepts the two possible readings of the poem, i.e. by the non-Stoic and by the Stoic, but she emphasizes that they are not in conflict and that the message of the poem is thoroughly Stoic. P.A. Meijer, *Stoic Theology: Proofs for the Existence of the Cosmic God and of the Traditional Gods: Including a Commentary on Cleanthes' Hymn on Zeus* (Delft 2007), 208–228, contains a brief commentary on the *Hymn to Zeus*, but this is mainly based on his article, “Kleanthes' *Loflied op Zeus*: Kunt ge nog zingen, zing dan mee!” *Lampas* 16 (1983) 16–37, and contains no reference to my own commentary.

Leben, it is a reasonable assumption that it was intended for performance within some kind of public setting.³³

Like the author of the *Golden Verses*, Cleanthes makes use of a variety of sources. One of the most impressive features of the *Hymn to Zeus* is indeed the manner in which traditional literary and religious material is combined with philosophical ideas while maintaining a conceptual and compositional unity. We thus find concepts and formulations from Homer, Hesiod, Solon, Heraclitus, and Orphic-Pythagorean texts, among others,³⁴ but Cleanthes transforms this material to suit his own purpose. A good example is vv. 18–21:

ἀλλὰ σὺ καὶ τὰ περισσὰ ἐπίστασαι ἄρτια θεῖναι
καὶ κοσμεῖν τ᾽ἀκοσμία, καὶ οὐ φίλα σοὶ φίλα ἐστίν·
ὥδε γὰρ εἰς ἓν πάντα συνήρמוκας, ἐσθλὰ κακοῖσιν,
ὥσθ' ἕνα γίγνεσθαι πάντων λόγον αἰὲν ἐόντα.
But you know how to make the uneven even
and to put into order the disorderly; even the unloved is dear to you.³⁵
For you have thus joined everything into one, the good with the bad,
that there comes to be one ever-existing rational order for everything.

These verses are clearly based on traditional formulations in Hesiod and Solon in which Zeus, as guarantor of justice, or his representative, 'Lawfulness' (*Eunomie*), is said to correct inequalities and injustices in society.³⁶ Cleanthes may also have been influenced by the Presocratic philosopher Heraclitus's concept of the *logos* as the union of opposites. According to this view, opposites such as even and uneven, good and evil, are merely a matter of human perspective; the *logos* as world-order combines both opposites into one harmonious unity (the so-called *coniunctio oppositorum*).³⁷ Cleanthes, however, changes both traditions to fit his own mes-

33 See the discussion of the genre and function of the poem in Thom, *Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus* (see n. 29), 7–13. For a somewhat different, more traditional perspective, see Zuntz, *Griechische philosophische Hymnen* (see n. 32), 41–42, although he also allows for the poem being known outside the Stoic school.

34 See Thom, *Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus* (see n. 29), 9, 20–27, as well as the top register of the critical apparatus to the text edition, pp. 34–39. The composition itself is discussed in *ibid.*, 13–20.

35 Literally, "what is not dear to you is dear to you".

36 Cf. Hesiod, *Op.* 5–9; Solon, *frg.* 4.32–39 West. See also the discussion in Thom, *Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus* (see n. 29), 99f.

37 The most relevant Heraclitus texts are *frgs.* 1, 23, 25–27, 91 Marcovich = 22 B 1, 2, 10, 50, 51, 102 Diels-Kranz. For Heraclitus's influence on Cleanthes see A.A. Long, "Heraclitus and Stoicism", *Philosophia* 5–6 (1975–76) 133–156. According to Long, *Epictetus* (see n. 4), 154 n. 9, the *Hymn to Zeus* here echoes Heraclitus's doctrine of the harmony of opposites. See also the other scholars cited in Thom, *Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus* (see n. 29), 22 n. 96.

sage. Instead of accomplishing social justice as in Hesiod and Solon, Zeus's leveling power operates in the *Hymn* within a cosmological context. Likewise, the pairs of opposites in the *Hymn to Zeus* do not exist in a harmonious balance in which each member of the pair is equally necessary and meaningful, as Heraclitus's concept requires. Instead of an equilibrium of opposites, the *Hymn* makes provision for a change from a state of disorder to one of order: Zeus can restore order in chaos and unity in plurality.³⁸

The main issue addressed in the *Hymn to Zeus* is the disturbance caused in the world-order by human evil.³⁹ This in turn results from a lack of insight into the position of human beings in the cosmos. The poem itself is intended to help rectify this situation. The author starts out by reminding his audience of the special position of humans in the cosmos based on their close relationship with God (vv. 3–5).⁴⁰ He then continues by praising the divine order at work in the whole cosmos (vv. 7–16), which is only disturbed by bad humans acting with folly (v. 17). They ignore God's eternal rational order (λόγον αἰὲν ἔόντα, v. 21) and pursue worthless goals (vv. 22–31). Cleanthes however assures his audience that God can restore order (cf. vv. 18–21) by providing humans with the very insight (γνώμη) on which his own cosmic rule is based (vv. 32–39).

Despite the relative brevity of the poem (71 verses), Cleanthes touches on a number of important topics: the relationship between God and the cosmos (vv. 1 f, 7–16, 18–21, 32, 35); the relationship between humans and God (vv. 3–6, 17, 22–25, 33–39); the problem of evil (vv. 17, 22–34); the

³⁸ For the problems of interpretation ensuing from reading vv. 18–21 along Heraclitean lines see G. Zuntz, "Zum Kleanthes-Hymnus", *HSCP* 63 (1958) 289–308, at 296–298; id., *Griechische philosophische Hymnen* (see n. 32), 38; and for criticism of the Heraclitean interpretation, K. Sier, "Zum Zeushymnos des Kleanthes", in *Beiträge zur hellenistischen Literatur und ihrer Rezeption in Rom* (ed. by P. Steinmetz; Palingenesia 28; Stuttgart 1990) 93–108, at 104f; J.C. Thom, "The Problem of Evil in Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*", *Acta Classica* 41 (1998) 45–57, at 54–56; id., *Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus* (see n. 29), 22–24. Asmis, "Myth and Philosophy" (see n. 32), 413, 422–424, 428f, finds no inherent conflict between a Heraclitean union of opposites and Cleanthes's depiction of Zeus, but she allows for "the power of Zeus to change bad to good" (here 429).

³⁹ Thom, "Problem of Evil" (see n. 38); id., *Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus* (see n. 29), 16–20; also Asmis, "Myth and Philosophy" (see n. 32), 414.

⁴⁰ This is clearly the meaning of these verses, no matter what emendation is given for the corrupt v. 4. The simplest emendation appears to be Pearson's proposal ἐκ σοῦ γὰρ γενόμεσθα θεοῦ μίμημα λαχόντες ("for we have our origin in you, bearing a likeness to God"); see the discussion in Thom, *Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus* (see n. 29), 54–62. Cf. now also Asmis, "Myth and Philosophy" (see n. 32), 420 n. 13: τοῦ σοῦ γὰρ γενόμεσθα λόγου μίμημα λαχόντες ("We are born having as our allotment an imitation of your *logos*"), i. e. following Meineke's emendation but replacing ἐκ with τοῦ.

question of human motivation (vv. 22–31, 36–39); the relationship between knowledge and ethics (vv. 23–25, 33–35), etc. What is more, he succeeds in presenting these topics within a coherent framework that provides both the outlines of a cosmology as well as pointers to a way of life.

Cleanthes is conscious of himself and his audience as human beings who as a group have a special relationship with God, have need of his assistance (vv. 34f), and have to praise him together (vv. 3, 38f). At the same time, the moral failings from which humans have to be rescued result from their personal lack of understanding (vv. 17, 22–33).

3. Pseudo-Aristotle, *On the Cosmos*

My third and final example comes from the Peripatetic tradition. The treatise *On the Cosmos* (*De mundo*)⁴¹ is ascribed to Aristotle but the majority of scholars agree that it could only have been written much later, although the proposed dates vary considerably, from ca. 200 BCE to the second century CE.⁴² A terminus ante quem is provided by the reworking of the *De mundo*

⁴¹ The best text edition is W.L. Lorimer (ed.), *Aristotelis qui fertur libellus de mundo* (Paris 1933). Available translations include E.S. Forster and D.J. Furley (trans.), *Aristotle: On Sophistical Refutations; On Coming-to-Be and Passing-Away; On the Cosmos* (LCL; Cambridge, MA 1955); H. Stroh (trans.), *Aristoteles: Meteorologie; Über die Welt* (Aristoteles Werke in Deutscher Übersetzung 12.1, 2; Darmstadt 1970); J. Tricot, *Aristote: Traité du Ciel, suivi du Traité Pseudo-Aristotélicien du Monde* (Paris 1949/1998). A new English translation with facing text, introduction, notes, and interpretive essays is forthcoming in the SAPERE series: J.C. Thom (ed.), *Divine Order and Cosmic Power: Pseudo-Aristotle, On the Cosmos* (SAPERE 22; Tübingen). All translations are taken from this volume.

⁴² Recent authors to argue for the authenticity of the work are P. Gohlke, *Aristoteles an König Alexander über die Welt* (3rd ed.; Aristoteles: Die Lehrschriften 4.4; Paderborn 1968); G. Reale, *Aristotele: Trattato sul cosmo per Alessandro* (Napoli 1974); A.P. Bos (trans.), *Aristoteles: Over de kosmos* (Meppel 1989); id., "Considerazioni sul De mundo e analisi critica delle tesi di Paul Moraux", *Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica* 82 (1990) 587–606; G. Reale and A.P. Bos, *Il trattato Sul cosmo per Alessandro attribuito ad Aristotele* (2nd ed.; Collana Temi metafisici e problemi del pensiero antico: Studi e testi 42; Milano 1995). For other proposals concerning the date cf. D.T. Runia, "The Beginnings of the End: Philo of Alexandria and Hellenistic Theology", in *Traditions of Theology: Studies in Hellenistic Theology, Its Background and Aftermath* (ed. by D. Frede and A. Laks; Philosophia Antiqua 89; Leiden 2002) 281–316, at 305 (200 BCE); C. Riedweg, *Jüdisch-hellenistische Imitation eines orphischen Hieros Logos: Beobachtungen zu OF 245 und 247 (sog. Testament des Orpheus)* (Tübingen 1993) 94 (1st half of 2nd century BCE); J. Mansfeld, "ΤΙΕΠΙ ΚΟΣΜΟΥ: A Note on the History of a Title", *VC* 46 (1992) 391–411, esp. 391 (not before the end of the 1st century BCE); H.B. Gottschalk, "Aristotelian Philosophy in the Roman World from the Time of Cicero to the End of the Second Century AD", *ANRW* II.36.2 (1987) 1079–1174, esp. 1138 (after 60 BCE); M. Pohlenz, "Philon von Alexandria", in *Kleine Schriften*, Vol. 1 (ed. by H. Dörrie; Hildesheim 1965) 305–383, esp. 382f, and P. Moraux, *Der Aristotelismus im I. und*

into Latin attributed to the Platonist Apuleius of Madaura (born ca. 125 CE). Depending on one's dating of the work, the *De mundo* may have been known to the Hellenistic-Jewish authors Aristobulus and/or Philo of Alexandria, but it is evident that these authors at least had several concepts, including that about God's power, in common with our text.⁴³

The *De mundo* was written for an audience with a general education rather than a scientific or philosophical training.⁴⁴ It communicates insights about the cosmos in a non-technical manner using images and comparisons rather than syllogistic proofs. Though aware of polemical issues such as the *aither* as fifth element or the eternity of the world, the author does not openly engage in polemical arguments. He furthermore tries to make his material attractive to a wider audience by employing various stylistic and artistic devices and by means of literary elaboration.⁴⁵

Like the *Golden Verses* and the *Hymn to Zeus*, the *De mundo* incorporates many different traditions. There are several Platonic allusions in the introduction (ch. 1)⁴⁶ and the work ends with two quotations from Plato (Leg. 4.715e7–716a3; 5.730c2–3 at *De mundo* 401b24–29).⁴⁷ The section on meteorology (ch. 4) has much in common with the first three books of Aristotle's *Meteorologica*, but it probably derives from a work by Theophrastus.⁴⁸ The author makes use of Stoic ideas, such as the notion of a cause holding the universe together, but gives them a Peripatetic interpretation.⁴⁹ He has an extensive quotation from an Orphic text,⁵⁰ and perhaps

II. Jh. n. Chr., Vol. 2 of *Der Aristotelismus bei den Griechen von Andronikos bis Alexander von Aphrodisias* (Peripatoi 6; Berlin 1984) 6f, 77, 81f (near the time of Philo of Alexandria); Strohm, *Über die Welt* (see n. 41), 268 (between the time of Plutarch [c. 45 CE – before 125 CE] and that of Apuleius [middle 2nd century CE]).

43 Cf. Riedweg, *Jüdisch-hellenistische Imitation* (see n. 42), 89–95; Runia, "Philo of Alexandria and Hellenistic Theology" (see n. 42), 304–306; G.E. Sterling, "Philosophy as the Handmaid of Wisdom: Philosophy in the Exegetical Traditions of Alexandrian Jews", in *Religiöse Philosophie und philosophische Religion der frühen Kaiserzeit: Literaturgeschichtliche Perspektiven* (ed. by R. Hirsch-Luipold et al.; STAC 51; Tübingen 2009) 67–98, esp. 77f.

44 Moraux, *Aristotelismus* (see n. 42), 57.

45 Moraux, *Aristotelismus* (see n. 42), 60–62.

46 E.g. to the 'eye of the soul' and the 'journey of the soul'; see Strohm, *Über die Welt* (see n. 41), 265, 274f; Mansfeld, "ἸΕΠΙ ΚΟΣΜΟΥ" (see n. 42), 410 n. 63.

47 See on the Platonizing tendency in the treatise in general also Mansfeld, "ἸΕΠΙ ΚΟΣΜΟΥ" (see n. 42), 394, 400, 410 n. 61.

48 See Moraux, *Aristotelismus* (see n. 42), 20–23; H. Strohm, "Ps. Aristoteles De Mundo und Theilers Poseidonios", *WS* 100 (1987) 69–84.

49 See J.J. Duhot, "Aristotélisme et Stoïcisme dans le *peri kosmou* pseudo-aristotélien", *Revue de philosophie ancienne* 8 (1990) 191–228; Mansfeld, "ἸΕΠΙ ΚΟΣΜΟΥ" (see n. 42), 394, 399, 401.

50 Orphic frg. 21 Kern = 31 Bernabé at *De mundo* 401a27–b6.

made use of Neopythagorean sources as well.⁵¹ It is however clear that the author intends his work to provide a Peripatetic solution to the question about the relation between God and the world.⁵²

As a short treatise rather than a poem, the *De mundo* covers much more ground than the two previous texts we have considered. It thus contains an extensive description of the cosmos, including sections on the cosmos in general (391b9–393a8), geography (393a9–394a6), and meteorology (394a7–396a32). Despite the amount of detail given in this description, the focus is not on the individual phenomena as such, but rather on the diversity and the tensions within the cosmos. This description then provides the backdrop for discussing the question how the cosmos is preserved despite the conflicting and mutually destructive forces active within the cosmos. The problem of the harmony (ἁρμονία) and preservation (σωτηρία) of the cosmos occupies the author throughout most of the second half of the treatise.⁵³ The author maintains that the cause holding the universe together (ἡ τῶν ὅλων συνεκτικὴ αἰτία) is ultimately God, but that he is not directly involved in the cosmos; instead, he influences the cosmos indirectly by means of his power (δύναμις). God is located at the highest point of the cosmos, but his power is able to permeate the universe and to reach down to its lowest levels (397b9–27). The author devotes much space to illustrate by means of various images and comparisons how it is possible for God's power to have an effect over a vast distance and how different results can be achieved from the same initial impulse. These comparisons are mainly taken from everyday life or common cultural experiences and indeed constitute one of the most attractive features of the *De mundo*.

The *De mundo* is less interested in the relationship between ethics and cosmology than the two other texts; the issue addressed is instead how to explain God's involvement in the world while still maintaining his independence. In order to do this Pseudo-Aristotle introduces the notion of

51 This has been argued by J.P. Maguire, "The Sources of Pseudo-Aristotle De Mundo", *YCS* 6 (1939) 111–167, but see F. Sarri, "Il problema del rapporto tra il De mundo attribuito ad Aristotele e la letteratura pitagorica dell'età ellenistica", *Pensamiento* 35 (1979) 267–314.

52 See J.C. Thom, "The Power of God in Pseudo-Aristotle's *De Mundo*: An Alternative Approach", in *The World Soul and Cosmic Space: New Readings on the Relation of Ancient Cosmology and Psychology* (ed. by C. Helmig and C. Marksches; Berlin forthcoming).

53 Cf. 396b17–34; 397a31, b5, 16, 20; 398a4, b10; 399a12, 17; 400a4; 401a24.

God's δύναμις as a kind of intermediary, functioning between God and the universe.⁵⁴

The main body of the *De mundo* also has an impersonal, objective tone, very different from the direct address found in the *Golden Verses* and the first person persona operating in the *Hymn to Zeus*. The *De mundo* opens, however, with a personal exhortation to Alexander, "the best of leaders",⁵⁵ to study philosophy (ch. 1). This will enable him to comprehend "the divine things" (τὰ θεῖα) and to acquire a divine perspective, a view from above,⁵⁶ on the large-scale relationships in the cosmos. Such 'theologizing' (θεολογεῖν) is fitting for someone like Alexander, who should "pursue the study of the greatest things" (τὴν τῶν μεγίστων ἱστορίαν μετιέναι). The treatise also closes with an explicit quotation from Plato in which two passages are conflated:

As the noble Plato also says: "God, as the ancient story tells, holding the beginning and the end and the middle of all things that exist, brings them to an end, travelling with a straight path according to nature. Justice always accompanies him, as avenger on those who fall short of the divine law. May he who intends to be blessed and happy have a share in it [sc. Justice] right from the beginning" (Leg. 715e–716a and 730c).

Of special interest here is the fact that in Plato the referent of 'it' is Truth, and not Justice. The author therefore seems to imply that the divine perspective provided by the treatise on the cosmos and God's role in within it, is a prerequisite for living a just and happy life.

IV. Conclusion

These three texts represent three very different philosophical traditions (Pythagorean, Stoic, and Peripatetic), but they each display many of the general characteristics of philosophy in the Hellenistic-Roman period.

⁵⁴ As I have argued elsewhere, this is similar to the cosmological role played by *Sophia* in Hellenistic-Jewish literature, or Christ in the Prologue to John, Colossians 1, and Hebrews 1. See J.C. Thom, "Kosmiese mag in Pseudo-Aristoteles, *De mundo*, en die Nuwe Testament", *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 68/1 (2012), Art. #1102 (<http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v68i1.1102>). J. Opsomer, "Demiurges in Early Imperial Platonism", in *Gott und Götter bei Plutarch: Götterbilder – Gottesbilder – Weltbilder* (ed. by R. Hirsch-Luipold; RGVV 54; Berlin 2005) 51–99, argues that the demiurgic function is frequently split up into two or more roles in Middle Platonic and Neopythagorean texts of this period, and that the *De mundo* is one of the first texts in which this distinction between the various divine functions is being made.

⁵⁵ The fictional addressee is presumably Alexander the Great.

⁵⁶ See Strohm, *Über die Welt* (see n. 42), 265: "Blick von oben".

Such characteristics include an emphasis on ethics rather than other more technical philosophical topics; a tendency towards selecting doctrines and ideas from various sources rather than staying within one tradition; a focus on the moral progress of the individual rather than a social ethic; psychagogical principles and practices to promote and support spiritual maturity; and the tendency to popularize philosophical ideas. As we have seen, these ideas include an interest not only in ethics, but also in the relations between God, human beings, and the world. Today, as in the Hellenistic-Roman period, the study of philosophy by the non-specialist can be a daunting task, but a careful consideration of texts such as these provides insight into some of the general philosophical concepts of this period.

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