

CHAPTER 1

The World of Roman Hellenism

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Introduction

The movement that later came to be known as Christianity began ca. 26 CE with the public appearance of Jesus ben Joseph of Nazareth, a rural Jewish prophet and teacher in the Galilee, a relatively small region in the Jewish territories located in the eastern Mediterranean region. Though Jesus was executed in Jerusalem by the Roman authorities ca. 29 CE, by the end of the first century CE, conventicles of the followers of Jesus were to be found in urban centers throughout the Mediterranean world. In 313 CE, Constantine the Great (272–337 CE) issued the Edict of Milan that mandated religious toleration throughout the Roman empire, canceling the penalties associated with the profession of Christianity that had been the basis for the persecution and execution of Christians and officially restoring the property that had been confiscated from them. By the end of the fourth century, despite its humble origins, Christianity had become the dominant religion of the Roman empire.

Palestine, the cradle of Christianity, was a region that had been a pawn in the power politics of Near Eastern and Levantine kingdoms for nearly two millennia and in consequence suffered domination by a series of both eastern and western empires. As a reform movement, nascent “Christianity” has been profoundly influenced by the traditions of rural Galilean Judaism. Judaism itself had begun to experience various degrees of Hellenization as early as the fourth century BCE (Hengel 1974). The Roman empire, which eventually took over all the Hellenistic monarchies founded by Alexander’s successors by 31 BCE, ironically became a military and administrative vehicle for continuing the spread of Hellenistic language and culture, making the term “Roman Hellenism” an appropriate political and cultural designation for the centuries following the Roman victory at the battle of Actium in 31 BCE.

What is Hellenization?

Early Judaism and early Christianity were profoundly but unevenly influenced by Hellenistic culture, evident in the adoption of Greek language, Greek names, Greek

institutions, and Greek literary and rhetorical forms and styles of writing and speaking (Aune 1987). While early Jewish Christianity experienced various degrees of Hellenization, converts to the new religious movement from the eastern Mediterranean were part of the culture of Roman Hellenism and required socialization into a faith with a strong Jewish cultural orientation and heritage.

The term “Hellenism” itself is a modern designation for the dominance of Greek language and culture over non-Greek societies in the ancient world, particularly during the three centuries following Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE) to the triumph of Rome, in the person of Octavian, over Ptolemaic Egypt, the last of the Hellenistic kingdoms, in the Battle of Actium. This period was first labeled “Hellenistic” by the nineteenth-century German historian J. G. Droysen (1877–8), author of an innovative history of Alexander the Great. According to Droysen the entire epoch was characterized by the meeting and combination of Greek with Near Eastern and Eastern cultures which together paved the way for Christianity. One of the most striking uses of the Greek term ἑλληνισμός occurs in 2 Maccabees 4:13, where it is paired with ἀλλοφυλισμός:

There was such an extreme of *Hellenization* [ἑλληνισμός] and increase in the *adoption of foreign ways* [ἀλλοφυλισμός] because of the surpassing wickedness of Jason, who was ungodly and no true high priest, that the priests were no longer intent upon their service at the altar.

ἑλληνισμός, “Hellenism” or “the Greek way of life,” is a one-word summary of Greek social and cultural identity, while ἀλλοφυλισμός has a more general meaning, “the adoption of foreign customs.” Both terms are used pejoratively in 2 Maccabees 4:13 and are antithetical to Ἰουδαϊσμός, “Judeanism” or “the Judean way of life,” i.e., Jewish religious and cultural identity (2 Macc. 2:21; 8:1; 14:38), which was thought by Jews to be threatened by both ἑλληνισμός and ἀλλοφυλισμός. The related term ἑλληνιστής (“Hellenist”) occurs in Acts 6:1 (cf. 9:29; 11:20), where the terms “Hellenists” and “Hebrews” are used antithetically, apparently referring to Greek-speaking Jews from the Diaspora in contrast to Aramaic-speaking Palestinian Jews, without any suggestion of a negative attitude toward cultural assimilation like that found in 2 Maccabees 4:13.

Though Greeks had contact with other eastern Mediterranean cultures long before the formation of the Greco-Macedonian kingdom in 356 BCE, these contacts were sporadic and occurred largely in the context of trade and military operations. An incidental feature of the program of conquest begun by Philip II (382–336 BCE), and expanded by his son and successor Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE), was the use of Hellenism became a medium for unifying a vast and disparate empire, the result of the introduction and spread of Greek language and cultural institutions. Though the polymath Plutarch of Chaeronea (46–120 CE) was convinced that Alexander consciously used it as a tool for providing social and cultural unity for new areas of conquest, this was an anachronistic perspective based on the strikingly perduring Hellenistic character of Levantine and Near Eastern cities in the centuries following Alexander’s conquest. These cities originated as military colonies which were populated with soldiers and civilians from the Greek world who, despite their humble origins became a cultural elite who regarded their

language and way of life as superior to those of the “barbarians,” i.e., the indigenous population. The Greek institutions that were part of each of the thirty or so “city-states” founded by Alexander typically included an acropolis, walls, an agora (a large public space that served as the center of commerce, local administration, and social and religious activities), temples, a theater, and a gymnasium (Pausanias 10.4.1). The gymnasium, a center for athletic exercise and training, traditionally done in the nude (from the Greek word *gymnos*, “naked”), was a symbol of Greek culture that often violated the attitudes toward the human body found in most Near Eastern cultures. The construction of a gymnasium in Jerusalem was extremely controversial (1 Macc. 1:14; 2 Macc. 4:9).

Predictably, native populations reacted to Hellenism in one of two ways. Those natives interested in upward social mobility in colonial society and government and who aspired to positions in Greek colonial administrations adapted to the changed conditions by their pragmatic acceptance of the superiority of Greek language and culture and the inferiority of their own. The Greeks themselves regarded their language and culture as superior to those of all other people, a conviction that was accepted at least for pragmatic reasons by upwardly mobile natives. For others, particularly those in rural areas, Hellenism constituted a culture shock which they considered a threat to their traditional way of life and values and which they resisted in a variety of overt and covert ways (Eddy 1961). These antithetical reactions are dramatized in the two accounts of the conflict between Seleucid Greeks and Palestinian Jews in 2 and 4 Maccabees, where we are told of a Hellenizing party in Judea (centering in the priestly families who ran Judaea as a temple-state) alongside a group who preferred to die rather than to violate ancestral Jewish religious traditions. There were also several less insidious features of Hellenism which were absorbed by non-Greeks in a variety of subtle ways, including the Greek language, constitutional forms, personal and place names, literary styles and genres, and architecture.

The Political Framework of Roman Hellenism

1 *The Hellenistic period (323–31 BCE)*

The successful military campaigns of Alexander the Great in the second half of the fourth century BCE continued the expansion of the Macedonian empire begun by Philip II as far east as India and fundamentally changed the political and cultural character of both the Mediterranean world and the Near East. The Greek empire of Alexander also spelled the end of the Greek *polis* or city-state as an independent social and cultural entity. Alexander's unexpected death at the height of his career at the young age of 33 ignited a complex power struggle among those later called Alexander's *Epigonoï* or “heirs.” Alexander's death was the end of an era marked also by the death of his private tutor Aristotle (384–322 BCE), one of the greatest and most influential and innovative of Greek philosophers. Upon Alexander's death, Perdiccas, one of his generals, became the guardian and regent of the empire, since the child who would be briefly designated Alexander IV was being carried by Alexander's wife Roxanne when he died. The so-called “Partition of Babylon” was an agreement brokered by Perdiccas to divide Alexander's empire up into various

satrapies entrusted to men who belonged to Alexander's inner circle. The murder of all the members of Alexander's family was just one sordid chapter in the internecine conflicts between Alexander's would-be successors.

After several years of jockeying for power, following the battle of Ipsus in 301 BCE, three major Hellenistic kingdoms emerged, each named after its Greco-Macedonian founder. Antigonus I Monophthalmus ("one-eyed"), ca. 382–301 BCE, ruled over the Antigonid dynasty in Macedonia, Greece, and parts of Asia Minor, which finally capitulated to Rome at the battle of Pydna in 146 BCE. Seleucus I Nicator (358–281 BCE) had consolidated his control over Mesopotamia with the help of Ptolemy I Soter, the ruler of Egypt by 312 BCE, which became the date of the founding of the Seleucid dynasty. The largest of the Hellenistic kingdoms, the Seleucid empire included Asia Minor, Syria, and Mesopotamia. The Seleucid empire was also the most culturally and linguistically diverse of all the Hellenistic empires because it dominated an enormous geographical area. The Seleucid empire fell to Rome in 64 BCE. Ptolemy I Soter (367–282 BCE), who became satrap over Egypt in 323 BCE, founded the Ptolemaic dynasty that ruled over Egypt and Libya. The Ptolemies controlled Palestine until 198 BCE, exercising an iron-clad control over the local population for the purpose of maximizing taxation. Control of the high priesthood of the Jewish temple-state was a central instrument in the domination of the region. Alexandria, the capital of Ptolemaic Egypt, was also the home of a large Jewish population. Under the instigation of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (309–246 BCE, reigned 281–246 BCE), the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek began ca. 270 and was perhaps completed a century later. The story of this translation, with some legendary embellishment, is narrated in a pseudepigraphon called the *Letter of Aristeas*, written during the second century BCE. One indicator of Hellenization among the Jews of Egypt is the fact that the vast majority of surviving papyri and inscriptions written by Egyptian Jews are written in Greek (Haelst 1976; Horbury and Noy 1992). Ptolemaic Egypt was the Hellenistic monarchy that survived longest. Cleopatra VII, the last of the Ptolemaic rulers, committed suicide after she and Mark Antony were defeated by Octavian at the battle of Actium in 31 BCE.

The three main Hellenistic kingdoms were rivals with each other and with smaller Hellenistic kingdoms throughout most of their existence and these conflicts resulted in the frequent geographical reconfiguration of the boundaries of each empire. From 320 to 200 BCE, Ptolemaic Egypt dominated Syria and Palestine and was in constant conflict with the Seleucids over this region. It was also during the third century BCE that Greek replaced Aramaic as the lingua franca of the region. At the battle of Paneas in northern Galilee in 200 BCE, the Seleucid king Antiochus III the Great (241–187 BCE) took control of Palestine from the Ptolemies. The Seleucid kingdom, with its center of government in Syria, maintained control of Palestine until 142 BCE. The Seleucid empire was greatly expanded under Antiochus III, but his expansionist policies were halted by a series of catastrophic defeats at the hand of the Romans, beginning with the battle of Magnesia in 190 BCE.

Religious conflict was introduced to Palestine by Antiochus IV Epiphanes (215–164 BCE), who consciously made Hellenism a tool for uniting his vast empire with a focus on the introduction of Greek cults and the prohibition of native religious practices (1 Macc. 1:41–50). Antiochus began his Hellenizing policy in Palestine by appointing the

Hellenophile Jason, of the Oniad priestly family, to the high priesthood in 174 BCE. Jason embarked on a program of Hellenization by constructing a gymnasium in Jerusalem. Jason was ousted from his position in 172 BCE when a rival for the post, Menelaus, bribed Antiochus and was appointed high priest. In 167 BCE Antiochus had his troops occupy the Antonia, a fortress connected to the northwest corner of the Temple Mount. Antiochus then erected an altar to Zeus Olympios over the altar of burnt offering in the Jerusalem temple offering sacrifices on the twenty-fifth day of each month beginning with 25 Chislev 167 (1 Macc. 1:41–61; 2 Macc. 6:1–6). This act of sacrilege is remembered in Jewish apocalyptic literature as “the abomination that makes desolate” (Dan. 11:31; 12:11; Matt. 24:28). Antiochus also ordered the destruction of Torah scrolls and forbade the rite of circumcision.

This program of religious repression led to the Hasmonean rebellion led by Mattathias, a priest who lived in Modein. When a representative of Antiochus was sent to Modein to force Jews to sacrifice on a pagan altar, Mattathias refused to do so and killed both a fellow Jew who was about to sacrifice and the king’s officer as well. The Jewish festival of Hanukkah (“dedication”) had its origin as a commemoration of the retaking of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Jewish military leader Judas Maccabeus on 25 Kislev 165 BCE.

2 *The Roman period (31 BCE–476 CE)*

Even before the existence of the Greco-Macedonian empire under Philip II and Alexander the Great, Rome had been gradually expanding her influence in Italy and the western Mediterranean. By the middle of the third century BCE, Rome had taken political control of the Italian peninsula. After decisively winning a series of three wars with Carthage, a Phoenician colony in North Africa founded in the eighth century BCE and the chief economic competitor of Rome in the western Mediterranean, Rome gained undisputed control of the entire western Mediterranean. The three wars that Rome waged against Carthage were called the First Punic War (264–241 BCE), the Second Punic War (218–201 BCE), and the Third Punic War (149–146 BCE). The end of the Third Punic War was marked by the complete destruction of Carthage in 146 BCE, when Carthaginian territory was turned into the Roman province of Africa.

While Rome was expanding in Italy and the western Mediterranean in the third and second centuries BCE, she was also drawn into an expansionist policy in the eastern Mediterranean. By the conclusion of three Macedonian wars that Rome fought, first against Philip V of Macedon (214–205 and 200–197 BCE) and then Perseus of Macedon (171–168 BCE), Rome was largely in control of Macedonia and Greece. Following the second Macedonian war, Rome invaded Greece and defeated Antiochus III (241–187 BCE, ruler of the Seleucid empire at Thermopylae in 191 BCE). Finally, after putting down local revolts in Macedonia and Greece, both regions were turned into Roman provinces ruled directly from Rome. Corinth, which had participated in a revolt, was destroyed in 146 BCE by the Roman general Lucius Mummius as part of a program of intimidation. In 44 BCE, Corinth was refounded as a Roman colony.

From 133 to 27 BCE, the republic, founded in 509 BCE with the expulsion of the last Etruscan king, began to decline as the result of the coming to power of a series of

political and military strong men, such as Gaius Marius (157–86 BCE), who was elected consul seven times during his career, L. Cornelius Sulla (138–78 BCE), who marched on Rome in 88 BCE and established himself as dictator in 82 or 81 BCE and had 1,500 or more aristocrats proscribed, resulting in their murder, and Gnaeus Pompey (106–48 BCE), who conquered Palestine in 63 BCE and later came into conflict with Julius Caesar. The rise of strong populists culminated in that of Julius Caesar (100–44 BCE), who began a Roman civil war in 49 BCE, and thereafter was declared dictator for life, which ended with his assassination. This period (133–27 BCE) was marked by a conflict between the *optimates* and the *populares*, i.e., between those backing the senatorial aristocracy and supportive of an aristocratic oligarchy and those who sought dictatorial powers using their popularity with the masses as a power base. Octavian, an adopted son of Julius Caesar, came to power by defeating Mark Antony and his lover Cleopatra VII in 31 BCE at the sea battle of Actium. By 27 BCE, the republican form of government was in shambles, and Octavian, who took the name Augustus, became *princeps*, or the first man, and, assuming the autocratic powers granted to him by a puppet senate, ruled Rome from 27 BCE to 14 CE.

Augustus was an enlightened ruler who was careful to give the appearance of constitutionality to the powers granted him by the senate. The tribunician power (*tribunicia potestas*), granted to Augustus in 23 BCE, became the foundation of his principate, giving him the right to convene the senate and to veto any of its legislation; it also gave him personal inviolability (*sacrosanctitas*).

Under a series of emperors succeeding Augustus, including Tiberius (14–37 CE), the mad autocrat Gaius Caligula (37–41 CE), Claudius (41–54 CE), and Nero (54–8 CE), the Romans controlled all of the regions surrounding the Mediterranean sea, which they called *mare nostrum* (“our lake”). Roman military prowess, in combination with Roman roadbuilding and within the framework of political domination, ensured that the culture that the Greeks had introduced into the eastern Mediterranean was furthered by the Romans.

Literature and Rhetoric

During the Hellenistic period a conscious attempt was made by Greek intellectuals to identify and preserve the most important literary works of the past. One major center for this scholarly activity was the Mouseion (a Greek word meaning “house of the Muses,” the origin of the English word “museum”) in Alexandria, a research institution for the promotion of scholarship in all fields that included conference rooms, lecture rooms, a reading room, observatories, a zoo, a park, and a place for eating meals in addition to a library. The Mouseion was founded at the beginning of the third century BCE by Ptolemy I Soter and expanded by his son Ptolemy II Philadelphus. Zenodotus of Ephesus became the first head of the library in 284 BCE and became the father of textual criticism by his work on the original texts of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as well as other classic Greek texts. He was succeeded by Apollonius of Rhodes, chiefly known as the author of the *Argonautica*. Eratosthenes of Cyrene succeeded Apollonius ca. 247

BCE. Lavishly funded by the Ptolemies, the Mouseion funded visiting scholars from all over the Mediterranean world, providing for their families as well, giving them high salaries, free meals, no taxes, good lodgings, and servants (Pfeiffer 1968: 1.97). At its height, the library contained between 400,000 and 700,000 papyrus rolls, including literary and scientific works. The Mouseion was partly destroyed in 48 BCE during the siege of Alexandria by Julius Caesar, after which it was moved to a temple called the Serapeum, where it remained until ca. 391 CE.

Aristophanes of Byzantium (257–180 CE), a famous grammarian and librarian at the Mouseion, apparently drew up a list of authors which were called *egkrithentes* (“accepted” or “approved”), i.e., “classics.” In the late eighteenth century, this list of approved books was called the “canon” (Pfeiffer 1968: 1.207). The main evidence for this so-called “Alexandrian canon” is found in Quintilian (1.4.3, 10.1.53–72). The list was expanded at various periods. The ten literary categories included the following (the number of literary works in each category is shown in parentheses) (Aune 2003: 29–30): epic poets (5), iambic poets (3), lyric poets (9), tragic poets (5), comic poets (13), elegiac poets (4), orators (10), historians (9), philosophers (5), poetic pleiade (7). As an example of two of these lists, the five epic poets included Homer, Hesiod, Peisander, Panyasis, and Antichaus, while the five philosophers included Plato, Xenophon, Aeschines, Aristotle, and Theophrastus. The works on these lists were intended to serve as models of style and composition. The existence of the Alexandrian canon had both positive and negative effects on ancient literature. The works of “approved” authors were read in schools and by the educated; they were copied, recopied, and commented upon, and thus preserved for posterity. The works of “unapproved” authors, however, were neglected and eventually lost to posterity, though this was also the fate of many approved authors.

Despite the fact that the upper classes in the Greco-Roman world were highly literate and in possession of scores of stunning classics from the literarily creative periods of both Greek and Roman culture, on balance oral culture was a pervasive feature of the Mediterranean world in the first few centuries CE that had roots in classical Greece. Rhetoric, or persuasive speaking, was a crucially important skill in the ancient world. The Greek city-state, with its occasional democratic institutions, needed members of the assembly who could persuade others about important matters of policy. Complex legal systems required people who had need of the court system either to argue their case for themselves or hire someone who could do a better job. Much of the great literature that became canonized in Alexandria was available, not primarily through libraries (which were few and far between), but through oral interpretation in public places. Some of these great works, like the Herodotus’ *History of the Persian Wars*, was written with the intention of oral presentation. Certainly the great tragedies and comedies written by the Greek playwrights were not closet dramas intended for private reading, but rather for presentation on the stage.

Following Aristotle, rhetorical theorists divided rhetoric into three types according to the institutional context and the intended effect on the hearers. Judicial rhetoric, the rhetoric of the law courts, was intended to persuade a jury about what events had

occurred in the past. Deliberative rhetoric, the rhetoric primarily appropriate in the political assembly, was designed to persuade members who had the responsibility of voting on various issues about which course of action they should pursue in the future. Finally, epideictic or display rhetoric, was intended for providing enjoyment in the present by celebrating common social values, such as when a deceased person's virtues were extolled in a eulogy.

While the three types of rhetoric formulated by Aristotle lived on through the rest of antiquity and beyond into the medieval and modern world, they essentially preserve ways of coping rhetorically within the three primary institutions of the ancient city-state of the early fourth century BCE. When the assemblies of the city-state lost their governing power when their cities were subordinated to larger empires, deliberative rhetoric became attenuated into a rhetorical exercise with no real usefulness in the real world. Nevertheless, since the ancients virtually always read written texts aloud, authors consciously or unconsciously wrote in a kind of oral style since they knew their works would be read aloud. This is probably true, for example, of the letters of Paul. One can see Paul in one's mind's eye pacing back and forth as he dictates letters to his beloved communities, finally grabbing the pen from the secretary to scribble (Gal. 6:11): "See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand!"

Religion

The political and cultural unity imposed on the Levant and the Near East by the Greeks and then on the whole Mediterranean world by the Romans resulted in a period of creativity and change in the areas of religion and philosophy. Previously isolated ethnic cultural traditions came into increasing contact with each other often through military conquest but also through trade and commerce, and influenced each other in a number of ways. Cults in the Hellenistic world tended to focus on myth and ritual to the virtual exclusion of theology and ethics, whereas in the modern West religion is thought to consist of belief and myth systems as well as ritual and ethics. For the most part, theology and ethics were the primary concern of philosophical schools.

"Religion" for the ancients was not a separable component of culture, but rather an integral set of ideas and practices that permeated all aspects of life and thought. Unlike the modern West, neither the Greeks nor the Romans had a word for "religion" in the modern sense. In 1962 the Harvard historian of religion Wilfred Cantwell Smith argued that "religion" was a Western invention that first appeared on the scene at the beginning of the eighteenth century. In a similar vein, the French anthropologist Daniel Dubuisson argued that "religion," regarded as a discrete concept or distinct domain, is a Western construct invented by scholars in the nineteenth century.

What modern scholars call "religion" in the ancient world was embedded in Greek and Roman culture to such an extent that it is impossible to separate various social and cultural components from each other. Neither the Greeks nor the Romans had a religious identity that could be distinguished from their Greek or Roman identity as citizens or as members of families, clans, and tribes. As applied to the ancient world, then, "religion" is a third-order category applied to certain first-order discourse about features of

ancient cultic life available to us in Greco-Roman literature, papyri, inscriptions, iconography, and material remains. These primarily literary sources, often reinforced by the material remains of temples, altars, and the artistic depiction of cultic scenes on bas-reliefs and painted vases, provide access to first-order discourse about ancient beliefs expressed through prayers, hymns, oracles, festivals, rituals, and myths.¹

Several distinct forms of “religion” and religious traditions flourished in the Hellenistic world: (1) state cults, (2) domestic cults, (3) ruler cults, and (4) mystery cults.

1 *Greek state cults*

The Greek world consisted of hundreds of city-states in the Greek peninsula, the islands of the Aegean Sea, and the west coast of Asia Minor, as well as in the western Mediterranean in Sicily and in Magna Graecia in Italy. These city-states or *poleis* were independent both politically and culturally from the late eighth century BCE (when many of them were founded) through the mid-fourth century BCE. The independence of these city-states was gradually compromised, first by compulsory membership in leagues of cities dominated by particularly powerful cities, such as the Delian league of ca. 150 city-states formed in the fifth century BCE to deal with the Persian threat, but increasingly dominated by Athens. In the mid-fourth century BCE, many Greek city-states became subject to the expanding Greco-Macedonian empire, first under Philip II of Macedon (382–336 BCE) and then under Alexander the Great. Under the various Hellenistic kingdoms that were carved out of Alexander’s empire in the late fourth century, despite the loss of political independence, the traditional state cults of the Greek cities continued to flourish into the first few centuries CE within the framework of the Roman empire. Since the primary function of state cults had been to ensure national prosperity by promoting peace with the gods, the subjugation of cities to larger political units meant that the quest for prosperity had to be pursued at a higher level.

The cultural unity of the Greek people was fostered by several important pan-Hellenic institutions, including oracles and games. Herodotus (1.46) lists six oracles that were consulted by Croesus, king of Lydia, including Delphi, Abae in Phocia, Dodona, Amphiaraos, Trophonios, and Branchidae in Asia Minor. These oracles were consulted by emissaries from the many city-states that dotted the Greek world as well as individuals searching for divine guidance. The many healing oracles of Asklepios, of which the most famous were the sanctuaries at Cos (the center of a medical school) and Epidauros. These healing oracles were consulted by individuals with various types of illness, who typically underwent the process of incubation or sleeping in a temple of Asklepios. Athletic contests or games held regularly after the middle of the fifth century BCE, the major games included the Olympian (held every four years in August or September), Pythian (held every four years on the third year of the Olympiad in late August in honor of Apollo of Delphi), Nemean (held every second and fourth year in each Olympiad), and Isthmian (held near Corinth in honor of Poseidon on alternate years in April or May). Typical athletic events, including chariot racing, boxing, wrestling, sprinting, javelin throwing and archery, drew participants from all over the Greek world and were made possible in part by the temporary cessation of hostilities during the game in the event

that any the Greek cities were at war with each other. Major sacrifices and processions were the primary cultic features of such athletic celebrations.

The twelve Olympian gods became the most pervasive pan-Hellenic institution in the Greek world. The canonical list of twelve deities consists of Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Hades, Apollo, Artemis, Hephaestus, Athena, Ares, Aphrodite, Hermes, and Hestia. This list exhibits variations, however, for the earth deities Demeter and Dionysus, intentionally omitted from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Homer, are sometimes included on the list in place of Hades and Hestia. The many deities worshiped in the city-states of the Greek world were eventually identified with one or another of the Olympian gods and given epithets to distinguish them from deities of the same name worshipped elsewhere. Hesiod, a sixth-century BCE poet, wrote the *Theogony*, dealing with the origins of the gods and their genealogical relationships. The Olympic deities were still influential during the Roman period and are frequently mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles. For example, conflict between those who proclaimed the gospel and the worshipers of Artemis of Ephesus, an Olympian deity worshiped in the famous Artemision, is narrated in Acts 19:23–41. In Acts 14:8–20, Barnabas and Paul are mistakenly identified with Zeus and Hermes, and the local priest of Zeus attempted to offer sacrifice to them.

The Greeks recognized three categories of deity, the Olympian gods, associated with the sky (e.g., Zeus, Hera, Apollo, Poseidon), the chthonic or earth deities, associated with the earth (e.g., Demeter, Dionysos, Trophonios), and heroes, cults devoted to the powerful dead who occupied an intermediate position between gods and mortals (e.g., Herakles, Hippolytus). The Greek conception of deity is strikingly different from that of the Jews. For Greeks generally, the gods were immanent and active in the world, rather than transcendent and passive. While the God of the Jews is considered the creator of all that exists, for Greeks the cosmos is eternal and the gods originated in time. While Judaism conceives of God as omniscient and omnipresent, the gods of the Greeks are more powerful and wiser than humans, but can only be in one place at a time. From the eighth century BCE on, Greeks began to depict their gods in both painting and sculpture as ideal human beings: male gods are typically depicted as handsome and muscular, while female gods are presented as both beautiful and shapely.

Greek religion tended to focus on sacrifice, prayer, processions, and festivals, and each city-state typically had its own distinctive religious calendar. Greek sacrifice, performed both publicly and privately, centered on the slaughter of certain kinds of domestic animals, parts of which were burned on an altar and parts of which were eaten by those offering the sacrifice. Sacrificial protocol involved the knowledge of what kind of animal each deity required (e.g., Athena preferred cows, while Demeter preferred pigs). A further distinction was made between the sacrificial protocol for sky deities and earth deities. Sacrifices to sky deities (Zeus, Athena, Poseidon, etc.) were made during the daytime on raised altars with light-colored animals whose throats were slit so that the blood would spurt toward the sky. Sacrifices to earth deities (Demeter, Dionysos, etc.) were made on a low altar or in a pit, with a preference for dark-colored animals whose throats were slit so that the blood spurted downward. Sacrifices were typically accompanied by prayer and a procession of ivy-wreathed worshipers in the company of a flute-player. Divination was regularly used just before the sacrifice to determine whether or not it was propitious to offer a particular victim to a particular deity at a particular time.

Reciprocity is a pervasive feature of Greek society that also plays an important role in the Greek conception of prayer (Aune 2001: 23–42). In Greek culture, every gift or service rendered to someone else placed a moral obligation on the recipient for an equivalent counter-gift or counter-service. Prayer is closely linked with sacrifice because the gift of the victim to the deity obligates the deity to respond to the worshiper in an appropriate manner. The prayer accompanying the sacrifice is typically formulated to indicate what the worshiper would like in return for the sacrificial gift. Plato (*Politicus*, 290c; LCL trans.) expresses this cultic dynamic: “The priests, according to law and custom, know how to give the gods, by means of sacrifices, the gifts that please them from us and by prayers to ask for us the gain of good things from them.” A regular feature of the structure of ancient Greek prayers was a section detailing the reasons why a particular divinity should respond favorably to a request. A clear example of this practice is found in *Iliad*, 1.39–42:

Smintheus [an epithet of Apollo], if ever it pleased your heart that I built your temple, if ever it pleased you that I burned all the rich thigh pieces of bulls, or goats, then bring to pass this wish I pray for: Let your arrows make the Danaans [i.e., Greeks] pay for my tears shed.

Two other common reasons are included in prayers that tell the god why he or she should answer the prayer: (1) because the god or goddess had done so in the past, and (2) because it lies within his or her competence to do so.

Religious festivals were a central part of public religious observances in the Greek world. Athens, the Greek city about which most is known, celebrated ca. 120 festivals each year (Parke 1977). One of the more prominent and popular festivals in Athens was the Panathenaia in honor of Athena held on the twenty-eighth day of Hekatombaion, the first month of the Athenian year, commemorated as the birth day of the goddess (Parke 1977: 33–50). A central feature of the festival was the ritual presentation of a enormous and colorful new *peplos* (outer garment), which was woven and decorated each year by a group of young girls from aristocratic families. The garment was brought to the Parthenon on a cart built to look like a ship, where it was hung on the mast like a sail. From the mid-fifth century on, it was placed on the thirty-foot high statue of Athena sculpted by Pheidias. The Panathenaia procession is depicted in bas-relief on the disputed Elgin marbles, originally part of the architecture of the Parthenon, but which since the early nineteenth century have been held by the British Museum in London.

2 Greek domestic cults

In the ancient Greek world, the home of the extended family (οἶκος) was the center for a private cult that focused on the hearth, the tomb, and the domestic shrine. The male head of the family functioned as an absolute authority and as the priest of the domestic cult. The center of the home was the hearth (ἔστια; the goddess Hestia, invoked first in all domestic prayers, was the personification of the hearth), which also functioned as the domestic altar, but was also where the household cooking was done. The hearth fire was not allowed to go out until it was ceremonially extinguished and relit on a specified day each year. The hearth was the focus of several rites of passage (newborns

several days old were carried around the hearth; brides were integrated into the family gathered around the hearth). The gods of the household consisted of sky deities, earth deities, and deified ancestors. Prayers to the household gods were pronounced every morning and evening, accompanied by a libation of wine poured into the fire before every meal. Two altars, one to Zeus Herkeios (“Zeus of the courtyard”), located in the courtyard and Zeus Ctesios (“Zeus who guards possessions”), who functioned as the protector of the household gods, were located in the house.

3 *Hellenistic and Roman ruler cults*

Ruler cults first developed in Greek world when the Greco-Macedonian empire began to expand into the Levant and the Near East and previously independent Greek city-states were subjected to external rule, first by Greco-Macedonian dynasties and eventually by the Romans. The Ionian cities of western Asia Minor had proclaimed the divinity of Alexander the Great when he liberated them during his campaign against the Persians. Among the mainland Greeks, however, only the league of Corinth voted divine honors to Alexander in 324 BCE, shortly before his death. Elsewhere, Alexander requested and received divine honors and in response provided various benefits for those cities which participated. After Ptolemy I died (ca. 280 BCE), his son and successor Ptolemy II arranged for the formal deification of his father and his mother as “savior gods.” Ptolemy II and his wife Arsinoe were deified ca. 270 CE, and thereafter each successor to the Ptolemaic throne was deified upon accession.

While the Hellenistic ruler cults focused on living rulers, in Rome the ruler cult focused on deceased emperors who were deified by vote of the senate after death. Julius Caesar was posthumously deified by the senate in 42 BCE, arranged in part by Octavian his adopted son who took the title *divi filius*, “son of the god [Julius]” as a strategy for legitimating his intention to rule Rome. Many of the emperors beginning with Augustus were posthumously deified in emulation of the legend of the *apotheosis* or deification of Romulus, the legendary founder of Rome. In the eastern Mediterranean, however, particularly in Roman Asia, cults in honor of living emperors were instituted in various cities (e.g. Pergamum and Ephesus), who regarded the right to celebrate cults to living emperors as a great honor. Toward the end of the first century and beginning of the second century CE, Christians who were arrested were often required to sacrifice to the emperor to prove that they had renounced their beliefs.

4 *Hellenistic mystery religions*

The phrase “mystery religion” (based on the Greek words μύστικς, which means “initiant,” and μυστήριον, which means “ritual of initiation”) were quasi-public cults that were voluntary and required initiation. In this respect, it was markedly different from the state and domestic cults of the Greek world, in which citizenship and membership in a family were the basic requirements for participation. Since the rituals of these cults were secret (like the masonic rituals of the modern West), the term μυστήριον came to connote “*secret* rites of initiation.” While many mystery cults moved into the

Mediterranean region from further east during the Hellenistic era (the period of their greatest popularity was the first through the third centuries CE), the oldest of all mystery cults was indigenous to Greece: the Eleusinian mysteries, which had their cult center in Eleusis in Attica. The more prominent mystery cults from the Greek world, in addition to the Eleusinian mysteries are the Great Gods of Samothrace and the mysteries of Dionysos. The more prominent mysteries that moved into the Greek world from the Levantine countries include the mysteries of Mithras, the mysteries of Isis, and the mysteries of Magna Mater.

While very little is known about the inner workings of the mystery cults, their ritual programs had three primary features: (1) *δρῶμενα* (“things acted out”), some kind of dramatization of the myth upon which the cult was based; (2) *λεγόμενα* (“things spoken”), the oral presentation of the myth on which the cult was based; (3) *δεικνύμενα* (“things shown”), the ritual presentation of symbolic objects to the one being initiated. Following the experience of a ritual initiation, new members of the cult became convinced that they would enjoy salvation, both in this life (i.e., health, prosperity, safety) as well as in the life to come. Sophocles, in a saying preserved by Plutarch (*How to Study Poetry*, 22f.) emphasizes the salvific benefits of initiation: “Twice blessed are those who go to Hades after beholding these rites. For them alone is there life there; for all others only evil.”

Until the last third of the twentieth century, mystery religions were thought to be inspired by the annual decay and restoration of vegetation, symbolizing death and resurrection in the human world. In part this is the result of the comparison of the mystery religions with Christianity, which has a central focus on the death and resurrection of Jesus as the salvific event appropriated by individual Christians in baptism. Scholars associated with Göttingen-centered German history of religions school, active at the beginning of the twentieth century, argued that the Pauline understanding of the Lord’s Supper and dying and rising with Christ in baptism had antecedents in the mystery religions. Scholarship during the second half of the twentieth century disclosed the widespread diversity that characterized Hellenistic mystery religions together with the fact that a dying and rising god was rarely a central mythic symbol. Even the phrase “mystery religions” itself is inappropriate, since they were in no way exclusive and were in fact special forms of larger contexts of religious practice (Burkert 1987: 10).

A prime example of the death–resurrection pattern in the mysteries is found in the Eleusinian mysteries, which celebrated the symbolic death of Persephone, the daughter of Demeter, who had been seized by Hades, the god of the underworld, and made his queen. After fruitlessly searching for her daughter for nine days, according to the myth (recounted in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*), after finally appealing to Zeus, who sent Hermes as his emissary to Hades, Persephone was returned to her mother Demeter on the condition that she spend one-third of every year in the Underworld with Hades. Demeter’s name means “earth mother,” while Persephone apparently represents grain; two-thirds of the year in Greece constitute the rainy season, while for one-third of the year conditions are dry and vegetation is dormant. Initiation into the Eleusinian mysteries was a two-stage process. The first stage involved initiation into the Lesser Mysteries (celebrated annually in Athens during the month Anthesterion), and, after the interval of at least one year, the second stage consisted of initiation into the Greater

Mysteries (which were held during the Athenian month Boedromion). The second stage began from Athens, with a sacrifice of pigs to Demeter, followed by a procession to the Telesterion (“hall of initiation”) at Eleusis in western Attica, not far from the isthmus of Corinth, where the initiation ritual was held.

Philosophy

1 Introduction

In the ancient world, the pursuit of philosophy achieved its classical expression in the thought of Plato and Aristotle during the late fifth through the late fourth centuries BCE, both of whom have profoundly affected Western thought. While the three most important Hellenistic schools of philosophy will be discussed in some detail below, there were many other philosophical traditions in play in the Hellenistic and Roman world. Cynicism, revived during the Roman period, is not treated here for two simple reasons: (1) it was not a “philosophy” in the ordinary sense of the word, with no school with successive leaders; (2) very little is known about the Cynics, who seem not to have had a system of teachings like the other philosophical schools, so much as a far-out lifestyle. Platonism continued to be influential, but had been transformed into what is now labeled Middle Platonism, which began in the late second century BCE (with the activities of Antiochus of Ascalon, 130–68 BCE) and lasted until the late second century CE with the work of Numenius of Apamea, who was a Neopythagorean concerned to trace Platonic doctrine back to Pythagoras.

In the Hellenistic and Roman periods, however, the most influential philosophical schools were Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Skepticism (or Pyrrhonism), all of which had their origins in the Hellenistic period. All of the philosophical schools were shut down by order of the Christian emperor Justinian I in 529 CE. Despite the diversity of their respective philosophical systems, all three schools shared several basic perspectives. (1) Founded during a period of Mediterranean history in which individuals and their societies were frequently subject to external forces over which they had no control, all three schools focused on the inner life of the mind over which individuals could exert control. (2) Further, while classical philosophical schools typically had three separate but related concerns – physics, logic and ethics – the three major Hellenistic philosophies placed a primary emphasis on ethics centering on living a life of virtue. (3) All three schools could agree with the Epicurean definition of philosophy (Sextus Empiricus *Adversus mathematicos*, 11.169; LCL trans.): “philosophy is an activity which secures the happy life by arguments and discussions.” (4) Finally, all three schools made wide use of a medical model: the philosopher functioned like a compassionate physician whose task was to diagnose human suffering experienced by individuals in order to provide the appropriate philosophical therapy, enabling them to recover and lead a flourishing life (Nussbaum 1994: 13–47). Cicero (*Tusculan Disputations*, 3.3.6) provides a typical example of the widespread use of this metaphor:

Assuredly there is an art of healing the soul – I mean philosophy, whose aid must be sought not, as in bodily diseases, outside ourselves, and we must use our utmost endeavour, with all our resources and strength, to have the power to be ourselves our own physicians.

For Hellenistic philosophers, then, philosophy was a way of life rather than a theoretical discipline.

2 Stoicism

Stoicism is based on the Greek word *stoa*, meaning “colonnade” in the phrase *stoa poikile*, “painted colonnade,” a structure overlooking the agora in Athens where the school was begun ca. 300 BCE by Zeno of Citium (334–262 BCE). Stoicism was an important philosophical tradition that had an 800-year history and became the most influential philosophy for the educated in the Roman empire. The focus of this brief description of Stoic ethics largely centers on Stoicism during the early Roman empire, a period that coincided with the rise of Christianity. Among the more prominent philosophers of late Stoicism, whose writings survive, is Epictetus (ca. 55–135 CE), a slave who became a noted Stoic philosopher. The oral lectures of Epictetus were transcribed by an auditor, Arrian of Nicomedia (ca. 86–after 146 CE). Other important Stoics of the early empire include Seneca, Arius Didymus (fl. late first century BCE and early first century CE), and the philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius (121–80 CE; emperor 161–80 CE).

An important feature of Stoic physics is the view that God and the material universe are essentially identical (Seneca, *Epistulae morales*, 92.30). Just as the soul pervades the human body and is endowed with reason (the faculty allowing humans to think, plan and speak), so God is identified with the divine λόγος (“Reason”) or νοῦς (“Mind”), that pervades the cosmos and is also found in gods and in human beings. Note that Plato had earlier divided the soul into rational and irrational elements and that the presence of an irrational or emotional element in the soul was introduced into Stoicism by the Stoic philosopher Poseidonius (135–51 BCE), who accepted Plato’s teaching on this subject, arguing that the irrational part of the soul should be subjected to the rational part. For Stoics, the cosmos consists of two substances; matter is a passive substance, while universal reason (or God) is the active substance which acts upon matter. Stoics were both materialists (rejecting any dualism of matter and spirit) as well as determinists. For them the cosmos consisted of material objects which interacted in accordance with unchanging laws that they designated as fate or providence. The human person with a rational soul and a physical body is a microcosm of the universe, which itself is a rationally organized structure. Human beings are ruled by fate or providence and cannot control external events; they can only accept them (or reject them at their peril). In the Stoic view, living in accordance with reason means living in harmony with the divine order of the universe.

Ancient philosophers thought that emotions were *cognitive*, e.g., fear is the expectation of impending evil. The Stoics maintained that all the passions or emotions were both unwanted and harmful, and held the extreme view that all passions should be eradicated. Aristotle and the Peripatetics, on the other hand, maintained that most emotions are useful in moderation and even essential for achieving the flourishing life. The Stoics had a generally intellectualist approach to understanding human emotions, maintaining that they were based on decisions made in the ἡγεμονικόν (“governing principle” or “self”), thought to be located in the heart, which was the center of

rationality in human beings. The governing principle processes external appearances (φαντασίαι) that present themselves through the five senses. Stoics thought that they had the option of accepting or rejecting sense impressions or appearances about the world. They formulated three ways in which a sense impression could be accepted as true (Burnyeat 1983: 11): (1) δόξα (“opinion”), a weak and fallible belief; (2) καταλήψις (“cognition”), infallible belief; (3) ἐπιστήμη (“understanding”), the type of cognitive belief of the wise man, irreversible even by reason.

The Stoics maintained that there were four basic categories of the passions or emotions, which were the basis of all other emotions: pleasure, distress, appetite, and fear (the subtypes of each generic emotion are elaborated in Diogenes Laertius 7.111–14). The Stoic view that anyone can attain freedom from the emotions makes it necessary that they be considered voluntary. Further, each emotion involves at least two distinct value judgments separated in time. The first judgment determines whether something either good or bad is at hand and the second judgment decides that it is appropriate to react (Sorabji 2000: 29). Zeno argued that all emotions were harmful and originated in a conscious disobedience to reason, e.g., people in an emotional state often recognize that it is inappropriate to do what they are doing, but continue to do it anyway (Sorabji 2000: 55, 60). Chrysippus (280–208 BCE), a student and successor of Zeno, who expanded and modified the basic doctrines of Stoicism, argued that all emotions were not the result of *disobeying* reason, but were rather *mistakes* of reason, i.e., evaluative judgments. By the beginning of the first century CE there were, then, two different conceptions of the emotions: one understood them as the result of disobedience to reason and the other understood them as the result of mistakes of reason (following Sorabji 2000).

Seneca (4 BCE–64 CE) analyzed the emotions to determine the extent to which they were voluntary or involuntary. He argued that there were mental “first movements,” i.e., expansions or contractions of the soul or what we would call physiological responses to various types of external stimuli. Using anger as an example of a negative emotion, Seneca proposed three stages of anger, with the first stage consisting of an involuntary component and the second and third stages consisting of voluntary components that harmonized the two different conceptions of emotion proposed by Zeno (disobedience to reason) and Chrysippus (mistakes of reason): (1) The first movement or agitation of the mind is involuntary, i.e., prior to the judgments characterizing stages (2) and (3), and cannot be considered an emotion (Sorabji 2000: 69–70; Seneca, *On Anger*, 2.2.1–2.4.2). (2) In the second stage, reason accepts the appearance of injustice, which is linked to the propriety of taking vengeance on the perpetrator (a mistaken judgment of moral reason). (3) In the third stage, one’s emotions are carried away and anger is expressed, i.e., one disobeys the erroneous judgment of reason (Sorabji 2000: 61; Seneca, *On Anger*, 2.4.1).

When the governing principle is not allowed to rule a person’s life through the exercise of self-control (ἐγκράτεια), harmful and destructive passions or emotions arise. The goal of philosophy is to learn what does not conform to reason and to nature and to reject it, a process that requires training, i.e., the examination of one’s own judgments and behavior to determine how they have departed from universal reason.

The greatest good is happiness or the flourishing life, which can be attained through virtue, which consists in living according to reason, which is the same as living accord-

ing to nature, for nature is the criterion of the rational and everything contrary to nature is considered irrational (Seneca, *Epistulae morales*, 5.4). The passions or emotions are always considered bad. An important term in Stoic ethics is ἀπάθεια (“freedom from passions or emotions”), i.e., a life unencumbered by human passions or emotions. Individuals are responsible, however, for their own actions, which can be controlled by examination and self-discipline. An example of such self-examination and reflection is expressed by Marcus Aurelius (*Meditations*, 2.1; LCL trans. [with modifications]):

Say to yourself at daybreak: I shall come across the busybody, the thankless, the overbearing, the treacherous, the envious, the unneighborly. All this has happened to them because they do not know good from evil. But I, in that I have comprehended the nature of the Good that is beautiful, and the nature of Evil that it is ugly, and the nature of the wrongdoer himself that it is similar to me, not as sharing the same blood and seed but of intelligence and a portion of the Divine, can neither be injured by any of them – for no one can involve me in what is debasing – nor can I be angry with my kinsman and hate him.

Early Stoics traditionally attributed virtue in the proper sense only to the ideal sage, considering everyone as foolish (Seneca, *Epistulae morales*, 75.8). Later Stoics rejected the absolute dichotomy between the sage and fools and spoke of making progress toward virtue. Seneca, for example, outlines several stages characterizing those making progress in virtue (*Epistulae morales*, 75; cf. Ware 2008: 270–1): (1) The highest stage consists of those who have rid themselves of all passions and vices, and though they are approaching perfect wisdom are not yet truly wise. (2) The second stage consists of those who have abandoned only the greatest passions, but who may fall back into these vices. (3) The lowest stage consists of those who have escaped many great vices, but have not yet conquered others.

3 Epicureanism

Epicureanism was founded by Epicurus (341–270 BCE) about 307 BCE and was widely known as “the Garden” because Epicurus taught philosophy in the confines of his home and walled garden in Athens, where he and his followers lived a very private, simple, and frugal life. Epicurus himself was a prolific author who wrote more than 300 rolls, reportedly without citing earlier writers (Diogenes Laertius, 10.26). The five works which have survived include three letters: *Epistle to Herodotus* (Diogenes Laertius, 10.35–83), *Epistle to Pythocles* (Diogenes Laertius, 10.83–116), and *Epistle to Menoceus* (Diogenes Laertius, 10.122–35; perhaps not genuine), a collection of maxims called the *Kyriai Doxai* or “Principle Doctrines,” consisting of extracts from the teaching of Epicurus probably compiled by his disciples (Diogenes Laertius, 10.135–54), a set of eighty-one maxims preserved in a Vatican manuscript and carbonized fragments of Epicurus’ thirty-seven-book work entitled *On Nature*, discovered in the Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum, like Pompeii, a city destroyed during the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE. One of the most famous ancient exponents of Epicurean thought in the Roman world was Lucretius, who wrote *De rerum natura* (“On the Nature of Things”), a Latin poem containing a masterful poetic compendium of the basic theories and arguments of Epicureanism. Another

representative of Epicureanism during the Roman period is Philodemus of Gadara (ca. 110–40 BCE), some thirty-six of whose works were discovered in the form of carbonized scrolls excavated in the eighteenth century in the Villa of the Papyri in Herculaneum. Another important second-century CE representative of Epicurean thought is Diogenes of Oenoanda, who carved a summary of Epicurean philosophy on a portico wall in Oenoanda in Lycia. Originally ca. 25,000 words long, about one-third of the inscription survives and is an important witness to Epicurean philosophy.

Epicurus thought that the primary purpose of philosophy was to enable people to live happy and pleasant lives, and therefore he focused on moral philosophy. The pleasant life, however, has moral entailments; according to *Kyriai doxai*, 5 (Diogenes Laertius, 10.140; LCL trans.): “It is impossible to live a pleasant life without living wisely and well and justly, and it is impossible to live wisely and well and justly without living pleasantly.” The most important means for living a happy life is the acquisition of friends (*Kyriai doxai*, 27). Justice is based on an informal social contract (συνθήκη) which prevents one person from being harmed by another (*Kyriai doxai*, 31–7). Epicurus attributed the basic causes of human unhappiness to mistaken beliefs about the gods (Epicurus, *Ep. Pythocles*, 123–4), the destiny of the soul, and the things in life that are thought valuable, and his teaching centered on discrediting such mistaken beliefs and replacing them with what he considered to be true beliefs (Long 1986: 14). Epicureans are hedonists in the sense that they considered pleasure as the primary goal of life: “We call pleasure the beginning and end of a blessed life” (Epicurus, *Ep. Menoeceus*, 128). However, it is more accurate to characterize the greatest good for Epicureans as “the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul” (*Ep. Menoeceus*, 131; cf. 137), but Epicurus also maintained that pains of the mind are worse than pains of the body (*Ep. Menoeceus*, 137). While pleasure is the beginning and end of the happy life, a distinction must be made between pleasures, with a preference for those that entail the least amount of pain. To seek more pleasure than one already has is to spoil the pleasure one has with the pain of unsatisfied desire. The ideal form of life is ἀταραξία (“imperturbability”) and the best way to achieve it is through philosophy.

Like the Stoics (their primary philosophical antagonists), Epicureans were materialists, dependent on a modified account of the atomic theory of Democritus (460–370 BCE). Epicurus posited that all events and all substances perceived by the senses are temporary compounds of inanimate atoms or indivisible bodies (Lucretius, 2.865–990), which have infinite shapes, and empty space (Lucretius, 1.426; Epicurus, *Ep. Herodotus*, 39–40), making theories of supernatural causation unnecessary. Change is brought about by the rearrangement of these changeless atoms. Atoms move downward at a constant rate and sometimes collide because they swerve from their path (a modification of Democritus; see Annas 1992: 175–88). This element of unpredictability in the cosmos is the basis for rejecting all forms of determinism and teleology (*Ep. Menoeceus*, 133–4), providing the basis for the exercise of free will (Lucretius, 2.256–60). Both creation and the eternity of the cosmos, widely held postulates of Platonism and Aristotelianism, were rejected by Epicureans. In the Epicurean view, the body is the container or vessel of the soul, and the soul is in the body as scent is in perfume. The soul is composed of several kinds of very smooth and round atoms (Lucretius, 3.177–230), which disperse upon death, so that anxiety about

death is rendered unnecessary, since there is no afterlife and no possibility of feeling (*Kyriai doxai*, 2; Lucretius, 3.830–69). The knowledge that the soul is dissolved upon death makes mortal life itself more enjoyable since there can be no desire for immortality (*Ep. Menoeceus*, 124–7). The soul is diffused throughout the body, with the rational element in the chest (the region of the emotions) and the irrational element everywhere else in the body (Annas 1992: 144–7).

Epicurus' theory of knowledge is based on the reliability of sense perception (Diogenes Laertius, 10.32), for the atoms of which all things are compounded give off εἶδωλα (“films” or “effluences”), which convey impressions to the senses and then to the mind. While such appearances are never false, mistaken judgments about them may occur through the formation of δόξαι (“opinions”) by the mind. For Epicurus, the emotions are complex kinds of feelings based on two kinds of perceptions: pleasure and pain which are the two basic kinds of πάθη, “passions” or “emotions” (Diogenes Laertius, 10.34).

While the gods exist, they are composed of atoms and void like everything else in the cosmos. Their existence is known because their atomic structure gives off fine “films” or “images” that are perceived directly by the mind, not the senses (*Kyriai doxai*, 1). The gods live far from the earth, have no concern for the human world or the cosmos, but live untroubled lives of eternal happiness (*Kyriai doxai*, 1); as such they provide an ideal model for Epicurean communities. Because of this, Epicurus regarded prayer and sacrifice as unnecessary and he also rejected all forms of divination (*Ep. Menoeceus*, 134).

Sorabji (2000: 343–417) traces the Stoic legacy of the cognitive nature of the emotions on the Christian conception of temptation found in such early Christian writers as Origen, Evagrius, and Augustine. According to Sorabji, the Stoic theory of how to avoid agitation (involuntary first movements or contractions did not yet constitute an emotion, make it theoretically possible to stop the emotion from forming) was transformed by certain early Christian authors as a way of avoiding temptation. For Origen, the Stoic involuntary first movements became bad thoughts, blurring the sharp Stoic distinction between first movements (which are involuntary and not emotions), and the emotions proper (for which a person is completely responsible). Evagrius formulated eight types of bad thoughts (Stoics' first movements in a Christian disguise) that only became sin if they were allowed to linger.

4 *Skepticism*

There were two main streams of Hellenistic Skepticism. One can be traced back to an enigmatic character named Pyrrhon of Elis (ca. 360–270 BCE), while the other is the introduction of skepticism into the Academy (the philosophical school founded by Plato), by Arcesilaus (ca. 316–241 BCE), the founder of the New Academy, which lasted until it was weakened by Philo of Larissa (ca. 159–84 BCE) a later head of the Academy. The most important Skeptic philosopher who compiled some important philosophical works is Sextus Empiricus (ca. 200 CE), a Greek physician who represents an attempt to return to the Pyrrhonian origins of Skepticism. Sextus wrote two compendia covering 500 years of skeptical argumentation, which are the most important primary extant sources

for the history and arguments of Hellenistic Skepticism – *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* and *Adversus mathematicos* (the latter was originally two separate works, one in books 1–6 and the other in books 7–11). The most important discussion of the skeptical phase of the Academy is represented by Marcus Tullius Cicero’s *Academica* (Cicero studied under Philo of Larissa, the head of the New Academy, after he had come to Rome in 87 BCE).

There are two distinguishing characteristics features of Hellenistic Skepticism. The first and most important of these is “its radical conviction that to suspend assent and to resign oneself to ignorance is not a bleak expedient but, on the contrary, a highly desirable intellectual achievement” (Sedley 1983: 10). The second feature is the methodical collection of arguments against the possibility of knowledge.

The term “Skeptic” is based on the word σκεπτικός, meaning “inquirer,” which first appears in the second century CE in the works of Sextus Empiricus as an alternate designation for “Pyrrhonist” (Sedley 1983: 20). Sextus uses “inquirer” in opposition to δογματικός, meaning “dogmatist” or more appropriately “doctrinaire thinker” (Sedley 1983: 21), an umbrella term for all philosophical schools who claimed to know something about reality. Why did Sextus prefer the term “inquirer” to designate the skeptical philosopher in opposition to the dogmatist? Ordinarily one thinks of an inquirer as someone who is open-minded and who seeks (and might eventually find) the truth. Apparently, the use of “inquirer” suggests that the Skeptic is one who is not hampered by doctrinal presuppositions, while the antithetical position is that of the dogmatist, who thinks he or she has already discovered the truth, e.g. Aristotle, the Stoics, and the Epicureans (Sextus Empiricus, 1.2–3). Sextus begins *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* with a definition of Skepticism:

Skepticism is an ability or mental attitude, which opposes appearances to judgments in any way whatsoever, with the result that, owing to the equal and opposite force [ἰσοσθένεια] of the objects and reasons thus opposed, we are brought firstly to a suspension of judgment [ἐποχή] and next to a state of tranquility [ἀταραξία]. (1.8; LCL trans. with modifications)

In this brief statement, Sextus emphasizes the goal of Skepticism, namely a kind of peace of mind represented by the frequent use of the term ἀταραξία (borrowed from Pyrrhon by Epicurus). The means to that goal is ἐποχή, “suspension of judgment,” and the reason for suspending judgment is ἰσοσθένεια, i.e., the equal and opposite force of the arguments, which cancel each other out, making the acceptance of either of the opposed arguments impossible. This view is attributed to Arcesilaus by Cicero (*Academica*, 1.45; LCL trans.):

His [Arcesilaus’] practice was consistent with this theory – he led most of his hearers to accept it by arguing against the opinions of men, so that when equally weighty reasons were found on opposite sides of the same subject, it was easier to withhold assent from either side.

Pyrrhon of Elis, who wrote nothing, was an older contemporary of Arcesilaus, who is often (and probably incorrectly) considered the founder of Skepticism (Burnyeat 1983: 14). He studied with Anaxarchus, a Democritean philosopher (a tradition that

denied the possibility of knowledge), who was a student of Diogenes of Smyrna, who in turn studied with Metrodorus of Chio, who famously claimed (alluding to Socrates) that he knew nothing, not even the fact that he knew nothing (Cicero, *Academia*, 2.73; Diogenes Laertius, 9.10.58). It appears that Pyrrhon's major contribution to later Skepticism was as a model of someone who lived without beliefs (Burnyeat 1983: 15).

Arcesilaus, a younger contemporary of Zeno and Epicurus, introduced methodological Skepticism to the Academy when he became its head ca. 273 BCE. He regarded himself as a true Platonist and heir of Socrates, based on his reading of the earlier dialogues of Plato, though it appears that he smuggled in Pyrrhon's philosophy (the elimination of all belief) without explicit acknowledgment (Burnyeat 1983: 15–16). The innovation of Arcesilaus was to regard the equal force of opposing arguments, not only as a rhetorical exercise (found frequently, for example, in Plato), but as leading to a suspension of judgment and of belief (Burnyeat 1983: 11). For Skeptics, the disease that prevents people from living a happy and tranquil (ἀταραξία) life is any kind of belief or commitment. A basic motto of Skepticism is “to every argument, let an equal argument be opposed” (Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.204; my trans.).

According to Arcesilaus the goal (τέλος) of life is ἐποχή, “suspension of judgment,” which is accompanied by ἀταραξία, “tranquility” (Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.232). Pyrrhon is also said to have maintained that the end was suspension of judgment, which brings along tranquility as its shadow (Diogenes Laertius, 9.107).

Aenesidemus, a member of the New Academy of which Philo of Larissa was head in the first century BCE, criticized the dogmatic tendencies of the New Academy under Philo after leaving to found his own more rigorous Skeptical school in which the hard-line views of Pyrrhon were revived. This Pyrrhonist movement prevailed from the first cent. BCE through the end of the second cent. CE with Sextus Empiricus, whose primary source was the lost works of Aenesidemus, but who pays very little attention to Pyrrhon. The chief contribution of Aenesidemus was the formulation of ten methods of suspension of judgment (Sextus *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 1.31–163; Diogenes Laertius 9.79–88).

Note

- 1 According to this schema, second-order discourse about ancient “religion” consists of the gathering and arrangement of data by natives, based on first-order discourse through description, definition, classification and is concerned about what participants in ancient cults say about what they are doing and what they believe about what they are doing.

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