





**Classical Paganism And The Christian Ethos**

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## Introduction

This book originated from some - mostly philosophical - questions asked of me during the Spring and Summer of 2017. One of those questions was:

You talk about how you have an appreciation for rural communities and how these communities sometimes have a wordless appreciation of the cosmos and share an aural tradition which originated decades if not centuries ago. Would you say that such a perspective is slowly being lost because of our modern way of living and that this lack of contact with the wordless, with nature, will cause more abstractions and thus, more suffering? If so, do you believe that such a rural way of living facilitates a journeying (both as an individual person and as a collectivity) toward Wu-Wei and a restoration of δίκη?

To which my answer was:

My fallible intimation - which yet again is nothing original or new - is that such a wordless perception of the Cosmos, and especially of Nature, is indeed being slowly lost for a variety of reasons. One reason seems to be an increasing dependence on technology and machines over and above crafts and work which require both a certain skill and the use of one's hands and hand-held tools, which crafts and work involve a certain careful, and slow, and often a toiling way of working. Another reason is a lack of direct, personal, and rural contact with Nature over the Seasons of many years, which rural closeness - through a working-there or a dwelling-there for years - reveals the natural rhythms of Nature and the Cosmos beyond, one of which rhythms is the process of balance, manifest as this sometimes is in good seasons, in bad seasons, and in birth, living, work, and death. Another reason is that for so many in the modern West there is no longer an ancestral culture of which one is a living, dwelling, part - a connexion between the past and the future and a connexion with a rural place of dwelling - and which culture preserves the slowly learned wisdom of the past, manifest as that often is in aurally and personally learning what is right, what is wrong, and thus how one should behave in order to maintain the natural balance of life. Instead there are external influences, changeable, and changing, manufactured and disposable, often material and egoistical and hubriatic in ethos and increasingly being rapidly relayed through various types of readily accessible media.

This took me beyond the mystical and somewhat eremitic and very personal weltanschauung I had developed in the previous five or so years which centred around a non-involvement - communal, social, political, cultural - except in the immediacy-of-the-moment in respect of personal honour.

A re-reading of classical authors such as Cicero, Seneca, Pliny, Homer, Plutarch, and Thucydides, among others, together with my on-going translations of tractates of the Corpus Hermeticum and the Gospel of John, made me consider whether it would be possible to provide an understanding of the numinous such that, for instance, what ancient (Greco-Roman) anthropomorphic deities and their interaction with mortals represented and presented in terms of ethos was expressed ontologically, in terms of Being, beings, and φύσις (physis) thus providing a better understanding of that ancient spirituality; a better understanding of the numinous, and of why Christianity supplanted in the lands of Europe that ancient pagan spirituality [1] and developed an ethos and a culture different in many respects from the ethos and culture of ancient Greece and Rome, a development that has culminated in what seems to be a modern schism between a Christian culture extolling the virtues of compassion, tolerance, inclusion, and equality - that is, which is more balanced in respect of the masculine and the feminine - and a Christian culture which retains and seeks to maintain what its proponents describe as a more traditional Christian ethos and practice evident for instance in their disdain for and often condemnation of - on the basis of their interpretation of the Scriptures - those whose love is for someone of the same gender.

Which schism returns us to a fundamental difference between Christianity (past and present) and the culture of ancient Greece and Rome, which is the Christian reliance on the Scriptures (and thus on its interpretation) and the Christian requirement that individuals not only trust someone whose mortal death occurred millennia ago but also believe that that person was, on the basis of the σημεῖα (signs) and δυνάμεις (miracles) described in parts of those Scriptures, the son of God. This difference inclines me to favour the type of pagan spirituality that was manifest in ancient Greece and Rome where, for example, τὸ καλόν, ἀρετή, and τὸ ἀγαθόν were related to and defined by certain living individuals: individuals of beauty; individuals of valour and courage; individuals of honour, manners, and nobility.

Yet the culture that arose around such an ancient spirituality was not noted for its compassion, tolerance, inclusion, and equality, and part of which ancient culture was an acceptance that enslavement of human beings was natural and necessary. Is such a pagan spirituality consistent with such (in my view, necessary) virtues as compassion, tolerance, inclusion, and equality? Is the combination of the pagan weltanschauung evident in the writings of Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Cicero and many other classical authors, and the pagan mysticism evident in many of the tractates of the Corpus Hermeticum, more human in physis, more balanced, and could possibly be more productive of a healthy ψυχή, than revealed religions such as Christianity? Is the fundamental difference between such a pagan spirituality and Christianity (past and present) simply the difference between λόγος (logos) understood as 'reason' and λόγος understood as faith and belief and thus as the Word of God?

This book represents my fallible attempt to answer such questions and to metaphysically express the substance of that paganus weltanschauung. Given that such a paganus weltanschauung could possibly be productive of a healthy ψυχή, it seems somewhat unfortunate - and perhaps also symptomatic - that the study of the literature of Ancient Greece and Rome has been in decline in the lands of the West for decades.

Although I have made extensive use of my translations of certain classical authors and of various hermetic texts as well as the Gospel of John, given that those translations are currently quite accessible I have not except on a few occasions explained my interpretations of certain Greek or Latin terms - exempli gratia: νοῦς as (according to context) perceivance, perceivation, rather than the conventional 'mind' - since such explanations are available either in the commentaries which accompany my translations of various hermetic texts and the Gospel of John, or in my writings concerning my 'philosophy of pathei-mathos.'

For this Second Edition, I have clarified and extended the text in several places, added a revised version of my essay *From Aeschylus To The Numinous Way* as an Appendix, and taken the opportunity to correct some typos.

David Myatt  
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[1] As I note in the text, I prefer the term paganus - a transliteration of the classical Latin, denoting as it does connection to Nature, to the natural, more rural, world - in preference to 'pagan' since paganus is, in my view and in respect of the Greco-Roman ethos, more accurate given what the term 'pagan' now often denotes.

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## Chapter One

An instructive example of the difference between the ethos of ancient Greece and the ethos of Christianity occurs in section 10 of tractate IX of the Corpus Hermeticum:

ταῦτά σοι, Ἀσκληπιέ, ἐννοοῦντι, ἀληθῆ δόξειεν, ἀγνοοῦντι δὲ ἄπιστα.  
τὸ γὰρ νοῆσαί ἐστι τὸ πιστεῦσαι, ἀπιστῆσαι δὲ τὸ μὴ νοῆσαι. ὁ γὰρ  
λόγος οὐ φθάνει μέχρι τῆς ἀληθείας. [1]

If you are insightful, Asclepius, such things should be uncovered for you, although without insight they would be doubted. For noesis is in trusting, while doubting is not noesis, with my logos attaining veracity. [2]

This statement of the need - the requirement - to trust a person and thus believe the doctrine or beliefs they are expounding is evidential of all revealed religions, from Judaism to Christianity to Islam. In Christianity, the requirement is to trust in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and to believe that the Passion, the death, the Resurrection, and the Ascension of Jesus are divine σημεῖα (signs, in the Gospel of John), and divine δυνάμεις (miracles, in the other Gospels) and which God-given signs or miracles are the basis of that trust and the foundation of Christian belief:

καὶ καθὼς Μωϋσῆς ὑψωσεν τὸν ὄφιν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ, οὕτως ὑψωθῆναι  
δεῖ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων ἐν αὐτῷ ἔχη ζωὴν  
αἰώνιον. Οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον, ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν τὸν  
μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀπόληται ἀλλ'  
ἔχη ζωὴν αἰώνιον. (John 3:14-16) [3]

For just as Moses elevated that serpent in a forsaken place so will the son of a mortal be elevated so that all those trusting in him might have life everlasting. For Theos so loved the world that he offered up his only begotten son so that all those trusting in him would not perish but might have life everlasting.

In addition, it is apposite that John 20:24-29 describes Thomas as doubting the veracity of the Resurrection of Jesus, with Jesus saying to Thomas:

Ἵτι ἐώρακάς με πεπίστευκας; μακάριοι οἱ μὴ ἰδόντες καὶ  
πιστεύσαντες.

Because you observed me, you have trusted. Those who have not observed yet have trusted are blessed.

There is also a supra-personal trust in what others have written:

Ἐμνήσθησαν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ὅτι γεγραμμένον ἐστίν, Ὁ ζῆλος τοῦ οἴκου σου καταφάγεται με. ἀπεκρίθησαν οὖν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ εἶπαν αὐτῷ, Τί σημεῖον δεικνύεις ἡμῖν, ὅτι ταῦτα ποιεῖς; ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Λύσατε τὸν ναὸν τοῦτον καὶ ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις ἐγερῶ αὐτόν. εἶπαν οὖν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, Τεσσαράκοντα καὶ ἕξ ἔτεσιν οἰκοδομήθη ὁ ναὸς οὗτος, καὶ σὺ ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις ἐγερεῖς αὐτόν; ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἔλεγεν περὶ τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ. ὅτε οὖν ἠγέρθη ἐκ νεκρῶν, ἐμνήσθησαν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ὅτι τοῦτο ἔλεγεν, καὶ ἐπίστευσαν τῇ γραφῇ καὶ τῷ λόγῳ ὃν εἶπεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς. (John, 2:17-22)

His disciples recalled that it was written: "Enthusiasm for your house will devour me."

In response, the Judaeans said to him: "What sign do you show us for you doing such things?"

Jesus replied, saying to them: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it."

The Judaeans said: "Forty and six years was this temple in building, and you will raise it in three days?"

When therefore he was raised from the dead his disciples recalled that he had said this and trusted what was written and the word that Jesus had spoken."

Which trust led - despite the words of Jesus - to individuals in the centuries that followed to rely on and to "search the writings [the scriptures] because you suppose that there is within them life everlasting and that they are a witness about me," ἐραυνᾶτε τὰς γραφάς, ὅτι ὑμεῖς δοκεῖτε ἐν αὐταῖς ζωὴν αἰώνιον ἔχειν καὶ ἐκεῖναί εἰσιν αἱ μαρτυροῦσαι περὶ ἐμοῦ (John, 5:39).

In contrast, the ethos of ancient Greece - well-explained in the first three books of Homer's *Odyssey*, and in many passages in *Thucydides* - is the ethos of respect for the divine manifest as the divine is in named divinities both male and female; in trusting someone based on a personal acquaintance and on knowledge of their reputation established as that has been through personal valourous deeds; in being hospitable to strangers of their own kind; and in not trusting those whose actions or deeds or bad manners have shown them to be disrespectful and/or cowardly and ignoble.

Thus *Thucydides* wrote:

ὅμως δὲ πόλιν μεγάλην οἰκοῦντας καὶ ἐν ἠθεσιν ἀντιπάλοις αὐτῇ τετραμμένους χρεῶν καὶ ξυμφοραῖς ταῖς μεγίσταις ἐθέλειν ὑφίστασθαι καὶ τὴν ἀξίωσιν μὴ ἀφανίζειν - ἐν ἴσῳ γὰρ οἱ ἄνθρωποι δικαιοῦσι τῆς τε ὑπαρχούσης δόξης αἰτιᾶσθαι ὅστις μαλακία ἐλλείπει καὶ τῆς μὴ προσηκούσης μισεῖν τὸν θρασύτητι ὀρεγόμενον - ἀπαλγῆσαντας δὲ τὰ ἴδια τοῦ κοινοῦ τῆς σωτηρίας ἀντιλαμβάνεσθαι.  
[4]

Since your abode is a great community reared with a suitable ethos,

you should not however great the calamity be overwhelmed and thus obscure your reputation - for mortals equally judge those who through weakness lose the reputation they have, as they dislike those who arrogantly try to grasp a reputation that does not belong to them - but instead put aside your sorrows and share in communal safety.

In a passage redolent of the classical pagan ethos [5] and thus worthy of being quoted in full, Homer describes how the youthful Telemachus - son of Odysseus - laments his misfortune to his guest, Athena - "the goddess with those beautiful blue eyes," [6] - who, as classical deities were sometimes wont to do, had 'shapeshifted' and thus disguised herself as Mentès, the proud son of battle-hardened Anchialus and Chief of those most excellent oarsmen, the Taphians, Μέντης Ἀγχιάλοιο δαΐφρονος εὐχομαι εἶναι υἱὸς ἄτὰρ Ταφίοισι φιληρέτμοισιν ἀνάσσω.

According to Homer, Book I, vv 213-268,

τὴν δ' αὖ Τηλέμαχος πεπνυμένος ἀντίον ἦῤα:  
'τοιγὰρ ἐγὼ τοι, ξεῖνε, μάλ' ἀτρεκέως ἀγορεύσω.  
μήτηρ μὲν τέ μέ φησι τοῦ ἔμμεναι, αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ γε  
οὐκ οἶδ': οὐ γάρ πώ τις ἐδὼν γόνον αὐτὸς ἀνέγνω.  
ὡς δὴ ἐγὼ γ' ὄφελον μάκαρός νύ τευ ἔμμεναι υἱὸς  
ἀνέρος, ὃν κτεάτεσσιν ἐοῖς ἔπι γῆρας ἔτετμε.  
νῦν δ' ὃς ἀποτμότατος γένητο θνητῶν ἀνθρώπων,  
τοῦ μ' ἔκ φασι γενέσθαι, ἐπεὶ σύ με τοῦτ' ἐρεεῖνεις.

τὸν δ' αὖτε προσέειπε θεά, γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη:  
'οὐ μὲν τοι γενεήν γε θεοὶ νῶνυμνον ὀπίσσω  
θῆκαν, ἐπεὶ σέ γε τοῖον ἐγείνατο Πηνελόπεια.  
ἀλλ' ἄγε μοι τόδε εἰπὲ καὶ ἀτρεκέως κατάλεξον:  
225 τίς δαίς, τίς δὲ ὄμιλος ὃδ' ἔπλετο; τίπτε δέ σε χρεώ;  
εἰλαπίνη ἢ γάμος; ἐπεὶ οὐκ ἔρανος τάδε γ' ἐστίν:  
ὡς τέ μοι ὑβρίζοντες ὑπερφιάλως δοκέουσι  
δαίνυσθαι κατὰ δῶμα. νεμεσσήσαιτό κεν ἀνήρ  
αἴσχεα πόλλ' ὀρόων, ὅς τις πινυτός γε μετέλθοι.

τὴν δ' αὖ Τηλέμαχος πεπνυμένος ἀντίον ἦῤα:  
'ξεῖν', ἐπεὶ ἄρ δὴ ταῦτά μ' ἀνεῖραι ἠδὲ μεταλλάξ,  
μέλλεν μὲν ποτε οἶκος ὃδ' ἀφνειὸς καὶ ἀμύμων  
ἔμμεναι, ὄφρ' ἔτι κεῖνος ἀνήρ ἐπιδήμιος ἦεν:  
νῦν δ' ἐτέρως ἐβόλοντο θεοὶ κακὰ μητιόωντες,  
οἳ κεῖνον μὲν ἄιστον ἐποίησαν περὶ πάντων  
ἀνθρώπων, ἐπεὶ οὐ κε θανόντι περ ὧδ' ἀκαχοίμην,  
εἰ μετὰ οἷς ἐτάροισι δάμη Τρώων ἐνὶ δήμῳ,  
ἢ φίλων ἐν χερσίν, ἐπεὶ πόλεμον τολύπευσεν.  
τῷ κέν οἱ τύμβον μὲν ἐποίησαν Παναχαιοί,  
ἠδέ κε καὶ ὧ παιδὶ μέγα κλέος ἦρατ' ὀπίσσω.  
νῦν δέ μιν ἀκλειῶς ἄρπυιαι ἀνηρείψαντο:  
οἴχετ' ἄιστος ἄπυστος, ἐμοὶ δ' ὀδύνας τε γόους τε  
κάλλιπεν. οὐδέ τι κεῖνον ὀδυρόμενος στεναχίζω  
οἶον, ἐπεὶ νύ μοι ἄλλα θεοὶ κακὰ κήδε' ἔτευξαν.  
ὅσσοι γὰρ νήσοισιν ἐπικρατέουσιν ἄριστοι,

Δουλιχίῳ τε Σάμῃ τε καὶ ὑλήεντι Ζακύνθῳ,  
ἦδ' ὄσσοι κραναὴν Ἰθάκην κáτα κοιρανέουσιν,  
τόσσοι μητέρ' ἐμὴν μνῶνται, τρύχουσι δὲ οἶκον.  
ἦ δ' οὔτ' ἀρνεῖται στυγερὸν γάμον οὔτε τελευτὴν  
ποιῆσαι δύναται: τοὶ δὲ φθινύθουσιν ἔδοντες  
οἶκον ἐμόν: τάχα δὴ με διαρραίσουσι καὶ αὐτόν.

τὸν δ' ἐπαλαστήσασα προσήδα Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη:  
'ὦ πόποι, ἦ δὴ πολλὸν ἀποιχομένου Ὀδυσῆος  
δεύρῃ, ὃ κε μνηστῆρσιν ἀναιδέσι χεῖρας ἐφείη.  
εἰ γὰρ νῦν ἐλθὼν δόμου ἐν πρώτῃσι θύρῃσι  
σταίῃ, ἔχων πῆληκα καὶ ἀσπίδα καὶ δύο δοῦρε,  
τοῖος ἐὼν οἶόν μιν ἐγὼ τὰ πρῶτ' ἐνόησα  
οἶκῳ ἐν ἡμετέρῳ πίνοντά τε τερπόμενόν τε,  
ἔξ' Ἐφύρης ἀνιόντα παρ' Ἴλου Μερμερίδα—  
ῶχετο γὰρ καὶ κείσε θεῆς ἐπὶ νηὸς Ὀδυσσεὺς  
φάρμακον ἀνδροφόνου διζήμενος, ὄφρα οἱ εἴη  
ιοὺς χρίεσθαι χαλκῆρεας: ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν οὔ οἱ  
δῶκεν, ἐπεὶ ῥά θεοὺς νεμεσίζετο αἰὲν ἐόντας,  
ἀλλὰ πατήρ οἱ δῶκεν ἐμός: φιλέεσκε γὰρ αἰνῶς—  
τοῖος ἐὼν μνηστῆρσιν ὀμιλήσειεν Ὀδυσσεύς:  
πάντες κ' ὠκύμοροί τε γενοίατο πικρόγαμοί τε.  
ἀλλ' ἦ τοι μὲν ταῦτα θεῶν ἐν γούνασι κεῖται

Then Telemachus - he full of vigour - said in answer:

"To you, my guest, I shall declare it with no fear of anyone.

My mother has announced that I am his - although this is something I myself

Do not know since no person can ever be completely sure whose offspring he is.

But I wish I was the lucky son of someone

Who had attained his old age with all his possessions

Instead of which - since you have asked me - I am a descendant

Of the most unlucky of mortals: he whom it is said I am descended from."

In answer, the goddess Athena - she with those beautiful blue eyes - said:

"The gods have decreed that hereafter your descendants

Will not be lacking in glory since Penelope has given birth to such a son as you.

But now, without fear of anyone, inform me about the following:

What have you to do with this crowd feasting here?

Is it a marriage, a banquet - or perhaps some public festival?

It is my opinion that they entertain themselves in this hall

In an overbearing, arrogant ill-mannered way

And any healthy man who happened to see them

Would be indignant at such disgraceful things."

Then Telemachus - he full of vigour - said in answer:

"I shall, since you, as a guest, have enquired and asked me about these things.

This family was wealthy - as it was steadfastly blameless

While he who was its man resided here.

But now it is different since the gods resolved to bring us bad luck

Having concealed him more completely than any other mortal

Which injures me worse than if they had conquered him

While he was among his comrades in the land of the Trojans

Or when his companions were nearby after that fighting was finished.

For then, the entire Achaean race would have prepared a tumulus for him

With his son inheriting his honourable name, whereas now  
He is without an honourable name having been snatched from us by abductors  
Who took him away silently and unobserved to leave me wounded and lamenting.

But it is not only because of him that I am wounded and grieving  
But because I have other injuries from the bad luck given me by the gods.  
They are those eminent ones, there, who rule in the islands  
Of Dulichium, Samos, Zancythus of the forests  
And those Chiefs of rugged Ithica itself  
All of whom seek to court my mother and who are exhausting this household.  
She cannot refuse what would be an odious marriage  
As she cannot fittingly make an end of this matter  
And so they are killing this household by gnawing away at it  
Just as they could soon break me who is by myself into pieces."

Then Pallas Athena - angry at this - said to him:  
"Before the gods! How great is the need here for the absent Odysseus -  
For him to set about these disrespectful ones with his fists!  
Would that he would arrive at the outer gate of this dwelling  
With his helmet on and holding his shield and two spears  
And as he was when I myself first saw him,  
At my own abode, drinking and enjoying himself  
He having set out from Ephyra and from Ilus son of Mermerus.  
He had gone there in that fast ship of his  
In search of a man-killing potion with which to poison his bronze-headed arrows:  
But that person would not give it since he believed he would be blamed  
By those gods who exist for aeons.

But my own father give it to him, for they were great comrades.  
May it be the same Odysseus who engages those suitors  
So that they all quickly die of the injuries he gives them  
Because of that marriage they had hoped for!  
But whether such things will be, depends on the gods."

Such quotations - and many more could be adduced - clearly illustrate the difference between a paganus weltanschauung and the religiosity of a revealed religion such as Christianity. In the paganus weltanschauung, there is an engagement with the world; feasting, drinking, enjoyment, combined not only with an awareness of the divine, of the gods, and thus of how the gods involve themselves with mortals, but also an appreciation of τὸ καλόν (the beautiful), of such things as manners, and how and why disrespectful ones should be personally punished by those they have disrespected or by their kin. In Christianity, there is a spiritual, and sometimes a literal, disengagement from the world, born from a belief in the possibility of attaining life everlasting; and a certain reliance on 'sacred' texts, studied and searched for guidance and for answers.

In regard to the paganus weltanschauung of ancient Greece, Sophocles expressed an important aspect of it:

οὐκ ἐκ θεῶν τὰ μῶρα καὶ γέλοια χρῆ χανόντα κλαίειν ὕστερ'

"If what is of the gods amuses you, be assured that lamentation will follow your mirth." [7]

Balanced as such an aspect is by Sappho:

ἄστερες μὲν ἀμφὶ κάλαν σελάνναν  
ἄψ ἀπυκρύπτοισι φάεννον εἶδος  
ὄπιτα πλήθοισα μάλιστα λάμπηι  
γᾶν [...] ἀργυρία

Awed by her brightness  
Stars near the beautiful moon  
Cover their own shining faces  
When she lights earth  
With her silver brilliance  
Of love... [8]

While the author of the Poemandres tractate expressed another aspect:

ὁ δὲ Νοῦς ὁ θεός, ἀρρενόθηλυς ὢν, ζωὴ καὶ φῶς ὑπάρχων, ἀπεκύησε  
λόγωι ἕτερον Νοῦν δημιουργόν, ὃς θεὸς τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ πνεύματος ὢν,  
ἐδημιούργησε διοικητὰς τινὰς ἐπτὰ, ἐν κύκλοις περιέχοντας τὸν  
αἰσθητὸν κόσμον, καὶ ἡ διοίκησις αὐτῶν εἰμαρμένη καλεῖται.

Theos, the perceiviation, male-and-female, being Life and phaos,  
whose logos brought forth another perceiviation, an artisan, who -  
theos of Fire and pneuma - fashioned seven viziers to surround the  
perceptible cosmic order in spheres and whose administration is  
described as fate.

As Aeschylus expressed yet another aspect centuries before:

ἄλλ' εἶμι κὰν δόμοισι κωκύσουσ' ἐμὴν  
Ἀγαμέμνονός τε μοῖραν. ἀρκείτω βίος.  
ὦ ξένοι,  
οὔτοι δυσοίζω θάμνον ὡς ὄρνις φόβῳ  
ἄλλως: θανούση μαρτυρεῖτέ μοι τόδε,  
ὅταν γυνὴ γυναικὸς ἀντ' ἐμοῦ θάνῃ,  
ἀνὴρ τε δυσδάμαρτος ἀντ' ἀνδρὸς πέσῃ.  
ἐπιξενοῦμαι ταῦτα δ' ὡς θανουμένη.

Now I will go to that family chanting an elegy about the Destiny  
Of Agamemnon and me. What I have lived has been sufficient.  
My friends:

I am in no way different from a fearful bird, suspicious  
Of a bush. Give testimony to this about my dying:  
For me, a woman, another woman shall die -

For her man, unluckily-wed, another man will fall.  
I - about to die - you received as a guest. [9]

An aspect balanced by Sappho:

φαίνεται μοι κῆνος ἴσος θεοῖσιν  
ἔμμεν' ὤνηρ, ὅττις ἐνάντιός τοι  
ἰσθάνει καὶ πλάσιον ἄδυ φωνεί-  
σας ὑπακούει  
καὶ γελαίσας ἰμέροεν, τό μ' ἦ μὰν  
καρδίαν ἐν στήθεσιν ἐπτόαισεν·  
ὡς γὰρ ἔς σ' ἴδω βρόχε', ὡς με φώναι-  
σ' οὐδ' ἐν ἔτ' εἴκει,  
ἀλλ' ἄκαν μὲν γλώσσα <ἔαγε>, λέπτου  
δ' αὐτικά χρωῖ πῦρ ὑπαδεδρόμηκεν,  
ὀπάτεσσι δ' οὐδ' ἐν ὄρημ', ἐπιρρόμ-  
βεισι δ' ἄκουαι,  
<έκαδε> μ' ἴδρωσ ψῦχος κακχέεται, τρόμος δὲ  
παῖσαν ἄγρει, χλωροτέρα δὲ ποίας  
ἔμμι, τεθνάκην δ' ὀλίγω 'πιδεύης  
φαίνομ' ἔμ' αὐταί

I see he who sits near you as an equal of the gods  
For he can closely listen to your delightful voice  
And that seductive laugh  
That makes the heart behind my breasts to tremble.  
Even when I glimpse you for a moment  
My tongue is stilled as speech deserts me  
While a delicate fire is beneath my skin -  
My eyes cannot see, then,  
When I hear only a whirling sound  
As I shivering, sweat  
Because all of me trembles;  
I become paler than drought-grass  
And nearer to death... [10]

In retrospect, it would therefore seem that the paganus weltanschauung evident in the writings of Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Cicero and many other classical authors, and the paganus mysticism evident in many of the tractates of the Corpus Hermeticum [11], might be, when combined, more human in physis, more balanced, and could possibly be more productive of a healthy ψυχή, than revealed religions such as Christianity, albeit (i) that the revealed religion of Christianity has evolved, over some two thousand years, to be more empathic, more compassionate, than such a Greco-Roman weltanschauung; and (ii) that the Greco-Roman weltanschauung has not undergone any evolution at all, and (iii) that such a Greco-Roman weltanschauung and such a Hellenic paganus

mysticism have hitherto been somewhat mis-understood often because of translations of ancient texts which, through an injudicious choice of words, impose modern meanings on such texts resulting in a retrospective re-interpretation.

Given this mis-understanding, it seems pertinent to examine the Greco-Roman weltanschauung in more detail.

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### Notes

[1] The Greek text used is that of A.D. Nock & A-J. Festugiere, *Corpus Hermeticum*, Tome I, Third Edition, 1972.

[2] Notes on the translation:

*insightful*. Regarding ἐννοέω cf. Aeschylus, Agamemnon, 1088, εἰ σὺ μὴ τόδ' ἐννοεῖς ἐγὼ λέγω σοι καὶ τάδ' οὐκ ἔρεῖς ψύθη, "If you had not observed this, then it is I who have told you - and you cannot pronounce it false."

Here, as in Poemandres 3 - νοῆσαι τὴν τούτων φύσιν, "to apprehend the physis of beings" - the sense is of having a perceptiveness, and thus of having, or of acquiring, a particular apprehension (cf. *noesis*, below) of certain things; whereas in the Agamemnon, the Chorus contrast their direct, clear, observation of something - their perception and thus their understanding - with the intuitive perceptions and prophecies of Cassandra, going on (vv. 1111-1112) to say to her, οὐπω ξυνῆκα: νῦν γὰρ ἐξ αἰνιγμάτων ἐπαργέμοισι θεσφάτοις ἀμηχανῶ, that the enigma of her unclear oracles are for the moment beyond their cunning, their understanding.

*uncovered*. As elsewhere in Corpus Hermeticum - qv. Poemandres 30, XI:1 et seq - ἀληθής is not something which is 'true' in some abstract disputable sense but rather what is uncovered, revealed, real, demonstrable, an actuality, and thus 'clear'. In personal terms - qv. John 1:14, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθεία - ἀληθεία is veritas: honesty, truthfulness, sincerity.

*noesis*. The process or the act of noetic apprehension. In the Corpus Hermeticum, νοέω and νοερός are often technical (esoteric) and related terms implying a particular type of apprehension, and thus do not necessarily denote what English words such as 'understand', intelligence, and 'intellectual' now so often denote. Qv. tractate XIII:22, "through noesis you have obtained knowledge about yourself and our father," νοερώς ἔγνωσ σεαυτὸν καὶ τὸν πατέρα τὸν ἡμέτερον, which requires contextual interpretation, as at XIII:2, σοφία νοερά, noetic sapientia, with noetic sapientia implying in that tractate that the knowledge and understanding that is noetically acquired transcends -

or at least is different from - the ordinary understanding acquired both (a) through observation of and deductions concerning phenomena and (b) through the use of denotata. Cf. the metaphysical terms νοῦς νοερός, νοῦς οὐσιώδης, and νοῦς ζωτικός in *Procli Diadochi In Platonis Timaeum Commentari*, Volume 5, Book 4, 245-247; and *Procli in Platonis Parmenidem Commentaria*, II 733 and IV 887.

*my logos*. Reading ὁ γὰρ λόγος μου φθάνει with the MSS and not the emendation of Nock. As in the title of XIII and elsewhere, λόγος could be translated here as 'discourse'.

[3] The Greek text is from NA28. Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th revised edition. Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart. 2012

[4] The Peloponnesian War, Book II, chapter 6

[5] I prefer to use the term *paganus* - a transliteration of the classical Latin, denoting a connection to Nature, to the natural, more rural, world - in preference to 'pagan' since *paganus* is, in my view and in respect of the Greco-Roman ethos, more accurate given what the term 'pagan' now often denotes.

[6] The Homeric epithet associated with Athena - γλαυκῶπις - is conventionally translated as 'with bright (or gleaming or grey) eyes' which is somewhat nondescript and rather unfitting for a goddess. However, Herodotus (4.108) uses γλαυκόν in reference to a tribe called Budini, living East of the Danube river, with the suggestion being - qv. the description of Tacitus in *Germanorum* I:4, "truces et caerulei oculi, rutilae comae" - of a blue-eyed, red-haired people. Hence my translation of the Homeric epithet as "with beautiful blue eyes" with 'beautiful' appropriately suggestive of a deep-blue and thus of being 'penetratingly' divine.

[7] *Ichneutae*, 369-370.

[8] Fragment 34.

[9] *Agamemnon*, 1313-1320.

[10] Fragment 31.

[11] Tractates such as *Ιερός Λόγος* (III), *Ἑρμοῦ πρὸς Τάτ ὁ κρατῆρ ἢ μονάς* (IV), *Νοῦς πρὸς Ἑρμῆν* (XI), and *Ἑρμοῦ του τρισμεγίστου προς τον υιόν Τάτ εν ὄρει λόγος ἀπόκρυφος περί παλιγγενεσίας και σιγῆς επαγγελίας* (XIII).

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## Chapter Two

The spiritual weltanschauung expounded in the Gospel of John - with the requirement that individuals trust the person of Jesus of Nazareth and believe that the Passion, the death, the Resurrection, and the Ascension of Jesus are divine σημεῖα (signs, omens) with Jesus, presented as a mortal, therefore being the Son of God - has, over two thousand years, significantly evolved.

The Johannine weltanschauung with its very human Jesus and its requirement of personal trust in a living being was (some might say, unfortunately) combined with other sources - including the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke - with a new weltanschauung and thence a new religion thus developed codified as that religion was in creeds, declarations, sermons, and dogma by those claiming to be the rightful heirs of such friends of Jesus as Simon Peter, and by those such as Paul of Tarsus who described himself as an apostle. The natural consequences of such codification, such claims of authority and such supra-personal organization, were - given our jumelle human physis - schisms, sects, accusations of heresy, persecution, torture, killings, wars, together with reformation and counter-reformation. That is, centuries of personal suffering deriving from individuals, groups, organizations, 'churches', denominations, and sects having a certitude of knowing regarding their particular interpretation and beliefs. For God - or so they believed - was 'on their side'. A belief fostered by their reliance on and their interpretation of what came to known as 'the Scriptures', the books of the Old and the New Testaments, dealing as those books mostly did with stories about those people the Greek-speaking Romans described as Hebrews. [1]

There thus developed, over centuries and in Europe, a belief - manifest initially in the Code of Justinian (529-534 CE) - that Christianity should both directly and indirectly influence the civil authority, a practice evident in that Code which began *In Nomine Domini Nostri Jesu Christi* and which influence over secular affairs continued for over a millennia with witnesses in courts of law, for instance, giving their evidence by holding or touching a copy of the Scriptures and taking an oath affirming that the 'Almighty God' of Christianity was their witness that what they were about to relate was the truth.

In effect, the dominant ethos of Europe, and of European colonies and émigré lands, was not only patriarchal - since both spiritual and civil authority resided in masculous cliques - but also in contrast to, and often the direct opposite of, the paganus ethos of ancient Greece and Rome, evident as that paganus ethos was in many things including:

(i) the appreciation of personal virtues such as τὸ καλόν, ἀρετή, and τὸ ἀγαθόν,

(ii) avoidance of ὕβρις,  
(iii) an appreciation of πάθει μάθος,  
(iv) an apprehension - intuitive or philosophical - of what it is convenient to describe as acausality; that is, of how beings, their physis, and their change(s) cannot be correctly understood by positing a primal cause (such as God) which or who is or the origin of such beings and which or who causally determines or can determine, and/or 'know', all the changes of such beings, past-present-future.

The personal classical virtues of τὸ καλόν, ἀρετή, and τὸ ἀγαθόν related to pre-eminent individuals: τὸ καλόν, the beautiful, to individuals of beauty and individuals who manifest a well-balanced demeanour [2]; ἀρετή, arête, to individuals of meritorious conduct, valour and courage; τὸ ἀγαθόν, the good, to individuals of honour, manners, and nobility. The classical pagan ethos thus celebrated such individuals, measured other individuals against them, with such virtues being defined - manifest - by such individuals. [3] However, the Christian ethos that dominated Europe for centuries measured individuals against 'the will of God' and against those individuals who were deemed to be examples of that will, with the supra-personal belief being that 'the will of God' could be found in the Scriptures and/or learned from those in positions of authority within the Christian Church who had themselves derived their understanding from particular interpretations of those Scriptures, either their own or, more often, those of others, past and present. [4]

The classical avoidance of ὕβρις (hubris) - expounded in works by Aeschylus, and in the Antigone and Oedipus Tyrannus of Sophocles - related the ancient apprehension, enshrined in ancestral tradition and born from centuries of personal experience, that certain deeds were unwise because they upset the natural and necessary cosmic balance and thus tended to result in misfortune for individuals or for families or for communities. In contrast, in Christianity "good" deeds and "bad" or "sinful" deeds were defined by God with his decision as to what is good and bad having been related to us in Scripture.

The classical appreciation of πάθει μάθος - described in the Agamemnon of Aeschylus [5] - related the understanding that pathei-mathos has a numinous (a divine) authority; which is that wisdom and understanding arises or can arise from one's own personal experience, from formative experiences that involve some hardship, some grief, some personal suffering. In contrast, in the Christian ethos numinous authority derives from God, can be found in Scripture, and learned from those in positions of authority within the Christian Church or from those who are believed to possess an understanding of the will of God.

### **An Appreciation Of Acausality**

The classical appreciation of acausality - and thus an important metaphysical difference between the classical and the Christian approach - is perhaps best

illustrated by stark examples of communal sacrifice of an individual or individuals undertaken in order to try and re-establish the natural balance and thus bring good fortune for a community and dispel whatever misfortune has befallen them or may befall them.

As described in both classical myth and in the Agamemnon of Aeschylus, Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter Iphigenia:

ἔτλα δ' οὖν  
θυτῆρ γενέσθαι θυγατρός,  
γυναικοποιῶν πολέμων ἄρωγὰν  
καὶ προτέλεια ναῶν.  
λιτὰς δὲ καὶ κληδόνας πατρώους  
παρ' οὐδὲν αἰῶ τε παρθένειον  
ἔθεντο φιλόμαχοι βραβῆς [...]

τὰ δ' ἔνθεν οὔτ' εἶδον οὔτ' ἐννέπω:  
τέχνη δὲ Κάλχαντος οὐκ ἄκραντοι.  
Δίκα δὲ τοῖς μὲν παθοῦσ-  
ιν μαθεῖν ἐπιρρέπει:  
τὸ μέλλον δ', ἐπεὶ γένοιτ', ἂν κλύοις: πρὸ χαιρέτω:  
ἴσον δὲ τῷ προστένειν.

So he dared  
To become the sacrificer of his daughter  
To aid a battle to avenge a woman  
By so consecrating the ships.  
Her warning of 'Father!', her supplications,  
Her virgin state - were counted as nothing  
By those commanders lusting for battle [...]

I did not see, and do not speak of, what followed these things.  
But the art of Calchas was not so incomplete:  
The goddess, Judgement, favours someone learning from adversity.  
But I shall hear of what will be, after it comes into being:  
Before then, I leave it,  
Otherwise, it is the same as a premature grieving.

(Agamemnon, vv. 224-230, 248-250)

For this sacrifice and for other deeds, Agamemnon himself is later killed by his wife, Clytemnestra, who describes the sacrifice (v. 1420) of her beloved child as a pollution, and which pollution of the numinous could - according to custom - only be removed by the shedding of blood, usually and if possible that of the perpetrator. [6]

Centuries later, Plutarch and Livy recounted how Fabius Maximus, Pontifex of Rome, had - following the defeat of the Roman army by Hannibal at the battle of

Cannae - sanctioned the sacrifice of a disgraced Vestal Virgin by having her buried alive (*stupri compertae et altera sub terra, uti mos est, ad portam Collinam necata fuerat*, according to Livy, Book XXII). This particular sacrifice - and other sacrifices - seemed, unlike the sacrifice made by Agamemnon, to be successful since Hannibal did not attack Rome and was later defeated by Scipio Africanus at the battle of Zama.

Why the apparent disparity in the outcome to two similar acts of propitiation? Because such disparity - such a manifestation of acausality, of the intuition of there being no absolutely determinable or pre-determined causal outcome to a mortal deed - is an essential if somewhat neglected and rather obscure aspect of the classical pagan *weltanschauung*; an aspect described mythologically by Sophocles in *Antigone*, 1338:

ὥς πεπρωμένης οὐκ ἔστι θνητοῖς συμφορᾶς ἀπαλλαγῆ.

Mortals cannot be delivered from the misfortunes of their fate

Philosophically, it was described in a fragment (80, Diels-Kranz) attributed to Heraclitus:

εἰδέναι δὲ χρὴ τὸν πόλεμον ἐόντα ξυυόν καὶ δίκην ἔριν, καὶ γινόμενα πάντα κατ' ἔριν καὶ χρεῶν

One should be aware that Polemos pervades, with discord δίκη, and that beings are naturally born by discord.

Also by Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book 5, 1015a,

καὶ ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κινήσεως τῶν φύσει ὄντων αὕτη ἐστίν, ἐνυπάρχουσά πως ἢ δυνάμει ἢ ἐντελεχείᾳ

For physis is inherent change either manifesting the potentiality of a being or as what a being, complete of itself, is.

That is, there is no perfect, outside agency or primal cause which consciously and in a cause-and-effect manner directs such change:

ὥστε ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνέργεια, μακαριότητι διαφέρουσα, θεωρητικὴ ἂν εἴη: καὶ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων δὴ ἡ ταύτη συγγενεστάτη εὐδαιμονικωτάτη. σημεῖον δὲ καὶ τὸ μὴ μετέχειν τὰ λοιπὰ ζῶα εὐδαιμονίας.  
*Nicomachean Ethics* (Book X) 1178b.22

Therefore the activity of theos, excelling others in bliss, is wordless-awareness [*θεωρέω*] and the nearest thing to that among mortals arises from good-fortune [*εὐδαιμονία*]. *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, 1178b.22

In modern metaphysical terms, there is a mortal apprehension that Being, and certain beings, are not or cannot be subject to, nor explainable, in terms of causality, in terms of a cause having a particular effect. Nor explained in terms of there being a primal cause which causes all effects. [7] However, such a belief in causality is the *raison d'être* of all religions and doctrines which posit a primal cause (such as an omnipotent creator-God) who brings-into-being and who governs and determines the changes, the changement - the *polemos*, the Destiny, the fate, the fortunes, the *wyrd* - of mortals and other beings.

Less metaphysically, Christianity - along with other religions or *weltanschauungen* which posit an omnipotent, unchanging, creator - assumes or projects a perfect form (ἰδέα/εἶδος) onto the cosmos which mortals have to strive to attain in order to gain some-thing (some ἰδέα/εἶδος) such as life everlasting in some-place (some ἰδέα/εἶδος) such as Heaven, and with their existing a definite, causal, eternal, means - such as scriptures or revelation or 'being chosen' - which describes or explains how such an ἰδέα/εἶδος can be attained. However, in the pagan *weltanschauung* of ancient Greece the activity of theos is not scriptures and revelations to his 'chosen people' but rather, as Aristotle noted, a wordless-awareness; and thus for mortals of there existing not the necessity of faith and belief in such scriptures and revelations but rather a personal quest - an *anados*, ἄνοδος - which by utilizing such things as λόγος (reason, discourse) and νοῦς (perceivation) is a quest for understanding and which understanding includes an appreciation of the numinous:

παραγίνομαι αὐτὸς ἐγὼ ὁ Νοῦς τοῖς ὀσίοις καὶ ἀγαθοῖς καὶ καθαροῖς  
καὶ ἐλεήμοσι, τοῖς εὐσεβοῦσι, καὶ ἡ παρουσία μου γίνεται βοήθεια,  
καὶ εὐθὺς τὰ πάντα γνωρίζουσι καὶ τὸν πατέρα ἰλάσκονται  
ἀγαπητικῶς καὶ εὐχαριστοῦσιν εὐλογοῦντες καὶ ὑμνοῦντες  
τεταγμένως πρὸς αὐτὸν τῇ στοργῇ

I, perceivation, attend to those of respectful deeds, the honourable, the refined, the compassionate, those aware of the numinous; to whom my being is a help so that they soon acquire knowledge of the whole and are affectionately gracious toward the father, fondly celebrating in song his position. (Poemandres 22)

Which "fondly celebrating in song" the theos whose being (existence) is a help, is quite different from the Christian faith in and obedience to an unobserved, unobservable, omnipotent God.

A difference also apparent when one compares the sentiment expressed in tractate VIII of the *Corpus Hermeticum* - with its "influencing impression" and empathy and its three θεοὶ (gods) - with a saying by Jesus as narrated in the Gospel of John.

Tractate VIII, 5,

τὸ δὲ τρίτον ζῶιον, ὁ ἄνθρωπος κατ' εἰκόνα τοῦ κόσμου γενόμενος, νοῦν κατὰ βούλησιν τοῦ πατρὸς ἔχων παρὰ τὰ ἄλλα ἐπίγεια ζῶια, οὐ μόνον πρὸς τὸν δεῦτερον θεὸν συμπάθειαν ἔχων, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἔννοιαν τοῦ πρώτου· τοῦ μὲν γὰρ αἴσθηται ὡς σώματος, τοῦ δὲ ἔννοιαν λαμβάνει ὡς ἀσωμάτου καὶ νοῦ, τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ.

Now, as to the third living being, mortals, brought-into-being as eikon of Kosmos and who, because of the deliberations of the father and beyond the other living beings on Earth, have perceivance and also empathy with the second theos and perception of the first. For of the one there is apprehension as of the corporeal, while of the other there is an influencing impression as of the incorporeal and as of a noble perceivance.

John, 3:36,

ὁ πιστεύων εἰς τὸν υἱὸν ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον· ὁ δὲ ἀπειθῶν τῷ υἱῷ οὐκ ὄψεται ζωὴν, ἀλλ' ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ μένει ἐπ' αὐτόν.

Whomsoever trusts in the son shall have life everlasting but whomsoever does not trust the son shall not see that life; rather, the anger of Theos [God] abides on them.

### **A Mortal Wordless-Awareness**

The mention of empathy - of a mortal wordless-awareness - and of Kosmos (κόσμος) and 'the father' (πατὴρ) in tractate VIII form a natural beginning for developing an ontology, an epistemology, and an understanding of ethics, that while having a foundation in the insights of the classical paganus weltanschauung may nevertheless represent an evolution of that weltanschauung. A natural beginning, since several of the tractates of the Corpus Hermeticum - for example, I (Poemandres), III, and XI - present or attempt to present that weltanschauung in a metaphysical way, beyond the deities of classical mythos. [8]

In VIII:5, mortals are described as 'eikon of Kosmos' and as having a συμπάθεια with this 'second theos'. In I:6 (Poemandres, section 6) and I:9, theos the father, the first theos, is well-described:

Οὕτω γινώθι· τὸ ἐν σοὶ βλέπον καὶ ἀκοῦον, λόγος κυρίου, ὁ δὲ νοῦς πατὴρ θεός. οὐ γὰρ διίστανται ἀπ' ἀλλήλων· ἔνωσις γὰρ τούτων ἐστὶν ἡ ζωὴ. I:6

Then know that within you - who hears and sees - is logos kyrios, although perceivance is theos the father. They are not separated, one from the other, because their union is Life.

ὁ δὲ Νοῦς ὁ θεός, ἀρρενόθηλος ὢν, ζωὴ καὶ φῶς ὑπάρχων, ἀπεκύησε λόγῳ ἕτερον Νοῦν δημιουργόν, ὃς θεὸς τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ πνεύματος ὢν, ἐδημιούργησε διοικητάς τινας ἑπτὰ, ἐν κύκλοις περιέχοντας τὸν αἰσθητὸν κόσμον, καὶ ἡ διοίκησις αὐτῶν εἰμαρμένη καλεῖται. I:9

Theos, the perceivation, male-and-female, being Life and phaos, whose logos brought forth another perceivation, an artisan, who - theos of Fire and pneuma - fashioned seven viziers to surround the perceptible cosmic order in spheres and whose administration is described as fate.

Theos is not only perceivation (νοῦς) but also both male and female (ἀρρενόθηλος) and which bifurcation explains what, in many of the tractates of the Corpus Hermeticum, the term πατὴρ metaphysically implies. Which is not a literal, anthropomorphic father, but 'the numen of all beings' (qv. III:1, δόξα πάντων ὁ θεός) and the progenitor - the origin, the foundation - of all being, of all that exists (qv. III:1, ἀρχὴ τῶν ὄντων ὁ θεός, and XI:3, πηγὴ μὲν οὖν πάντων ὁ θεός) and who by logos (λόγος) forms, presences, all being (qv. I:31, ὁ λόγῳ συστησάμενος τὰ ὄντα).

Thus to equate, as some have done, the πατὴρ (the male-and-female theos) of the Corpus Hermeticum - or, to be pedantic, the πατὴρ of tractates I, III, IV, VI, VIII, XI, XII, XIII - with the Father (God) as described in the New Testament is in my view a profound mistake.

The description of the male-and-female theos as the father raises the important issue of denotatum [9], and thus the limitation of words and the matter of interpretation of words especially in translations, and thence to why a reliance on written texts, as in Christianity, may well be a mistake.

Moreover, since theos of the Hermetica is perceivation and since - as the tractates make clear - we mortals, we human beings, possess the ability, the faculty, of perceivation then we can utilize that ability together with a wordless-awareness (empathy) to discover the theos (ὁ θεός) within ourselves; a process which is described in the Poemandres tractate as an anodos (ἀνοδος) which is the journey through and up the seven spheres which symbolize our material separation from the realms of the divine and thus our separation from immortality.

ooo

## Notes

[1] Qv. Pausanias, Book I, chapter 5, where he writes of Hadrian - whose virtues he extols - who crushed a rebellion by a Hebrew tribe:

Ἀδριανοῦ τῆς τε ἐς τὸ θεῖον τιμῆς ἐπὶ πλεῖστον ἐλθόντος καὶ τῶν ἀρχομένων ἐς εὐδαιμονίαν τὰ μέγιστα ἐκάστοις παρασχομένου καὶ ἐς μὲν πόλεμον οὐδένα ἐκούσιος κατέστη Ἑβραίους δὲ τοὺς ὑπὲρ Σύρων ἐχειρώσατο ἀποστάντας

[2] In respect of ancient Greek culture, τὸ καλὸν refers, in terms of individuals, to not only physical beauty - the beautiful - but also to a particular demeanour indicative of a well-balanced, noble, personal character, qv. Xenophon, *Hellenica*, Book V, 3.9,

πολλοὶ δὲ αὐτῷ καὶ τῶν περιοίκων ἐθελονταὶ καλοὶ κάγαθοὶ ἠκολούθουν, καὶ ξένοι τῶν τροφίμων καλουμένων, καὶ νόθοι τῶν Σπαρτιατῶν, μάλα εὐειδεῖς τε καὶ τῶν ἐν τῇ πόλει καλῶν οὐκ ἄπειροι

[3] Qv. Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, LXXI, 4

Summum bonum est quod honestum est; et quod magis admireris: unum bonum est, quod honestum est, cetera falsa et adulterina bona sunt

The greatest good is that which is honourable. Also - and you may wonder at this - only that which is honourable is good, with all other 'goods' simply false and deceitful.

Cf. Cicero, *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*, II, 45f

Honestum igitur id intellegimus, quod tale est, ut detracta omni utilitate sine ullis praemiis fructibusve per se ipsum possit iure laudari. quod quale sit, non tam definitione, qua sum usus, intellegi potest, quamquam aliquantum potest, quam communi omnium iudicio et optimi cuiusque studiis atque factis, qui permulta ob eam unam causam faciunt, quia decet, quia rectum, quia honestum est, etsi nullum consecuturum emolumentum vident.

[4] There is a similarity between this Christian apprehension and that described in certain hermetic texts, such as the beginning of tractate VI of the *Corpus Hermeticum*:

τὸ ἀγαθόν, ὃ Ἀσκληπιέ, ἐν οὐδενί ἐστιν, εἰ μὴ ἐν μόνῳ τῷ θεῷ, μᾶλλον δὲ τὸ ἀγαθὸν αὐτός ἐστιν ὁ θεὸς αἰεὶ· εἰ δὲ οὕτως, οὐσίαν εἶναι δεῖ πάσης κινήσεως καὶ γενέσεως

Asclepius, the noble exists in no-thing: only in theos alone; indeed, theos is, of himself and always, what is noble. If so, then it can only be the quidditas of all changement and of geniture.

I incline toward the view that such hermetic weltanschauungen influenced the development of early Christianity, rather than vice versa.

[5]

Ζῆνα δέ τις προφρόνως ἐπινίκια κλάζων  
τεύξεται φρενῶν τὸ πᾶν:  
ὄν φρονεῖν βροτοὺς ὀδώ-  
σαντα, τὸν πάθει μάθος  
θέντα κυρίως ἔχειν.

If anyone, from reasoning, exclaims loudly that victory of Zeus,  
Then they have acquired an understanding of all these things;  
Of he who guided mortals to reason,  
Who laid down that this possesses authority:  
*Learning from adversity.*

Agamemnon, 174-183

The Appendix, *From Aeschylus To The Numinous Way: The Numinous Authority of πάθει μάθος*, places the quotation in context.

[6] An often unappreciated aspect of the drama is the defiance and strength shown by Clytemnestra, who is described as a "woman with a man's resolve" (v. 11), who presents herself as a "most ancient fierce Avenger," (1499) and who says, after her killing of Agamemnon, that only "he who can overcome me in a fight will command me." (1423)

[7] In a simplified way and in terms of mythos, this lack of a pre-determinable outcome - a lack of one primal causation - can be understood as the divergence of opinion and deeds among the classical gods in respect of mortals, with an apposite example occurring in *The Odyssey* with the goddess Athena supporting and helping Odysseus while Poseidon was unrelenting in his rage at Odysseus. In addition Zeus, Chief among the gods, does not act unilaterally in respect of Odysseus but - in typical Hellenic fashion - says to Athena (Book I, vv. 76-77) that there will a gathering of the gods in order to consider the matter of his return to his home, ἀλλ' ἄγεθ' ἡμεῖς οἶδε περιφραζώμεθα πάντες νόστον.

[8] I have, in my *Corpus Hermeticum: Eight Tractates* translated and written commentaries on those tractates which I consider are metaphysically important in respect of understanding this development beyond, yet which (unlike some tractates) retain the essence of, the mythos of the classical paganus weltanschauungen.

[9] I use the term denotatum - from the Latin, denotare - in accord with its general meaning which is "to denote or to describe by an expression or a word; to name some-thing; to refer that which is so named or so denoted."

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### Chapter Three

That various tractates of the Corpus Hermeticum present a weltanschauung which is Greco-Roman and not something akin to Christianity is evident in tractate XI:3,

Ἡ δὲ τοῦ θεοῦ σοφία τί ἔστι;  
Τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ τὸ καλὸν καὶ εὐδαιμονία καὶ ἡ πᾶσα ἀρετὴ καὶ ὁ αἰὼν.  
[1]

But the Sophia of theos is what?  
The noble, the beautiful, good fortune, arête, and Aion.

That is, the sophia, the sapientia [2], of theos is presented not in the 'word of God' (scriptures) but in the personal Greek virtues of τὸ ἀγαθόν, τὸ καλόν, and ἀρετὴ, and in the metaphysical principle denoted by the term αἰὼν. [3] Aion brought Kosmos into being, and is the quidditas of all being (qv. XI:3, οὐσία δὲ ὁ αἰὼν) where by quidditas here is meant the ἀρχέτυπον of entities, the natural presencing of particular beings, and which natural (wordless) presencing is often perceived by mortals by means of - or as - a particular physis, whence our perception and understanding of the character or nature of a particular being or entity, with physis itself thus an eikon (εἰκὼν) of being (qv. I:31, οὐ πᾶσα φύσις εἰκὼν ἔφυ). In addition, sapientia is a revealing of all beings (qv. III:1, σοφία εἰς δεῖξιμ ἀπάντων ὧν) by means such as physis.

Given such metaphysical beginnings, and the problems associated with denotata, it is possible to suggest an ontology described by terms which are unrelated to gender, unrelated to past anthropomorphisms, and have no or few modern interpretations making them less liable to be the genesis of contemporaneous misunderstandings.

#### The Acausality Hypothesis

What has hitherto been denoted in the Corpus Hermeticum by the male-and-female theos, the progenitor - the origin, the foundation, the father, the artisan [4] - of all that exists, is Being, from whence beings come-into-being; a process described in XI:2 in terms of the metaphysical principles Aeon, Kosmos, and Kronos:

ὁ θεὸς αἰὼνα ποιεῖ, ὁ αἰὼν δὲ τὸν κόσμον, ὁ κόσμος δὲ χρόνον, ὁ χρόνος δὲ γένεσιν. τοῦ δὲ θεοῦ ὡσπερ οὐσία ἐστὶ τὸ ἀγαθόν, τὸ καλόν, ἡ εὐδαιμονία, ἡ σοφία· τοῦ δὲ αἰῶνος ἡ ταυτότης· τοῦ δὲ κόσμου ἡ τάξις· τοῦ δὲ χρόνου ἡ μεταβολή· τῆς δὲ γενέσεως ἡ ζωὴ καὶ

ὁ θάνατος.

Theos brought Aion into being; Aion: Kosmos; Kosmos, Kronos; Kronos, geniture. It is as if the quidditas of theos is actuality, honour, the beautiful, good fortune, Sophia. Of Aion, identity; of Kosmos, arrangement; of Kronos, variation; of geniture, Life and Death.

Kronos is brought into existence by Kosmos, with Kronos the origin of geniture - of the life, the spawning and propagation and variance of beings - and also of the death of those beings. [5]

If instead of the term Being we use the term 'acausal', then the acausal is the origin of - but distinct from - the causality that is denoted by Kronos and which causality is most evident to us in the limited duration of our mortal lives. Aion is the acausality of the perceived and perceivable Cosmos: limitless and encompassing all causality, past, present and future, and - in causal terms - never-ending. Living mortal beings, since they have acausality (the theos, ὁ θεὸς) within them, and are an eikon of the cosmos [6] and also possess the faculties, the abilities, of perceivance (νοῦς) and wordless-awareness (συμπάθεια) have a being which is both acausal and causal.

The paganus weltanschauung is thus one which posits that our being, and thence our physis, are a presencing of Being and an eikon, a microcosm, of the acausality and causality which constitutes the cosmos:

κόσμον δὲ θείου σώματος κατέπεμψε τὸν ἄνθρωπον, ζώιου ἀθανάτου ζώιον θνητόν, καὶ ὁ μὲν κόσμος τῶν ζώιων ἐπλεονέκτει τὸ ἀείζωνον, καὶ τοῦ κόσμου τὸν λόγον καὶ τὸν νοῦν. θεατῆς γὰρ ἐγένετο τοῦ ἔργου τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ ἄνθρωπος, καὶ ἐθαύμασε καὶ ἐγνώρισε τὸν ποιήσαντα.

A cosmos of the divine body sent down as human beings, for just as the ever-living cosmic order had an advantage over them so did they have an advantage over other living beings in their cosmos because of Logos and Perceivance. Thus did mortals perceive the works of theos, admire them, gaining knowledge of their creator.

That is, human beings re-present, presence, the 'divine body' and are, of themselves, a reflection of the cosmic order itself. This, and the preceding line, express a fundamental part of ancient paganism and Renaissance hermeticism: human beings as a microcosm of the cosmic order and the divine. Hence why the twenty-sixth chapter of the book *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda* by Marsilii Ficini (published in 1489 CE) has as its heading: *Quomodo per inferiora superioribus exposita deducantur superiora, et per mundanas materias mundana potissimum dona*, "How, when what is lower is touched by what is higher, the higher is cosmically presenced therein and thus gifted because cosmically aligned."

The acausality of the cosmos is manifest in Life, geniture, and in identity, in the variety, the type, and variation of living beings and their physis. Causality is manifest in the perceptible, the harmonious, the physical cosmic order and in the process that is the changement of that order and part of which changement is the inevitable death of physical living beings, with only we mortals, we human beings - so far as we know - having a physis such that we possess the capability - the gift - to become immortal:

ὅσοι δὲ τῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ δωρεᾶς μετέσχον, οὗτοι [...] κατὰ σύγκρισιν τῶν ἔργων ἀθάνατοι ἀντὶ θνητῶν εἰσι, πάντα ἐμπεριλαβόντες τῷ ἑαυτῶν νοί, τὰ ἐπὶ γῆς, τὰ ἐν οὐρανῶι, καὶ εἴ τί ἐστιν ὑπὲρ οὐρανόν· τοσοῦτον ἑαυτοὺς ὑψώσαντες, εἶδον τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ ἰδόντες συμφορὰν ἠγγήσαντο τὴν ἐνθάδε διατριβήν· καταφρονήσαντες πάντων τῶν σωματικῶν καὶ ἀσωμάτων ἐπὶ τὸ ἐν καὶ μόνον σπεύδουσιν.

And yet [...] those who parten to that gift from theos become, when set against their deeds, immortal instead of mortal. For they with their perceivance apprehend the Earthly, the Heavenly, and what is beyond the Heavens. Having gone so far, they perceive what is honourable, and, having so perceived, they regard what preceded this as a delay, as a problem and, with little regard for whatever is embodied and disembodied, they strive toward the Monas. [7]

Understood thus, we are, ontologically, emanations of and presence Being, and are a connexion to the cosmos - to other presencings of Being - through, in terms of epistemology, not only reason (λόγος), perceivance (νοῦς) and wordless-awareness (συμπάθεια, empathy) but also through τὸ ἀγαθόν, τὸ καλόν, and ἀρετῆ, through the beautiful and the well-balanced, the valourous and honourable, and those who possess arête, all of which are combined in one Greek phrase: καλὸς κάγαθός, which means those who conduct themselves in a gentlemanly or lady-like manner and who thus manifest - because of their innate physis or through pathei-mathos or through a certain type of education or learning - nobility of character. Which Greek phrase expresses the ethics, the high personal standards, of the ancient paganus weltanschauung we have been discussing, and which standards naturally resulted in two things. First, in only a minority of individuals in a particular πόλις or civitas - community, tribe, clan, or society - manifesting such standards in their daily lives, with such a minority often forming a natural, and ruling, aristocracy. Second, that it was often a person who lived (and was prepared to die) by such high standards who, because of their character or based on a reputation established through valourous and noble deeds, became or was chosen as the leader or the chieftain of some community, tribe, clan, or society.

For the quintessence of such a weltanschauung, of the paganus ethos, is that ethics are presented in and by particular living individuals, not in some written text whether philosophical or otherwise, not by some proposed schemata, and

not in some revelation from some deity. Which paganus ethics, when evolved - combined with the paganus mysticism evident in the Corpus Hermeticum and the cultural pathei-mathos of the past two millenia [8] presenced through the insight of empathy - leads us to a modern paganus weltanschauung.

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## Notes

[1] I follow the MSS, which have τὸ ἀγαθὸν, τὸ καλὸν, and εὐδαιμονία, all of which Nock omits.

[2] The English term 'wisdom' is not, given its modern connotations, an appropriate translation here of the Greek σοφία. Especially as the suggestion, as often elsewhere in the Corpus Hermeticum (qv. I: 29, et seq) is of a metaphysical principle or 'archetype', as is the case with Aion (αἰών) here, in tractate XI.

[3] Thus once again we encounter the limitations of denotata; of assigning particular words, terms or expressions to describe something metaphysical and which words, terms or expressions, over causal time, may acquire meanings which are not or may not be relevant to the original metaphysical context, as occurred here in respect of both αἰών and οὐσία, conventionally translated and thus (mis)understood as 'eternity' and 'essence'. Hence my transliteration of αἰών and translation of οὐσία by the unusual term quidditas, which is 11th/12th century Latin, from whence the word 'quiddity', a word originally from medieval scholasticism which was then used to mean the natural (primal) nature or form of some-thing, similar to the German prefix *ur* which passed into English usage in the 19th century.

[4] In respect of theos as the artisan-creator, qv. IV:1,

Ἐπειδὴ τὸν πάντα κόσμον ἐποίησεν ὁ δημιουργός, οὐ χερσὶν ἀλλὰ λόγῳ, ὥστε οὕτως ὑπολάμβανε ὡς τοῦ παρόντος καὶ ἀεὶ ὄντος καὶ πάντα ποιήσαντος καὶ ἐνὸς μόνου, τῆι δὲ αὐτοῦ θελήσει δημιουργήσαντος τὰ ὄντα

Because the artisan crafted the complete cosmic order not by hand but through Logos, you should understand that Being as presential, as eternal, as having crafted all being, as One only, who by thesis formed all that is.

Regarding the above translation:

*artisan.* δημιουργόν. See Poemandres 9. The theme of an artisan-creator, and

their artisements, is common to the third tractate (Ιερός Λόγος) as well. That the tractate begins by using the term artisan, rather than theos, is perhaps significant.

*that Being.* The conventional and grammatical interpretation is "you should understand him as..." although how such a human-type gender could be adduced from or manifest by how the 'body' of the artisan-creator is described in subsequent verses is an interesting and relevant metaphysical question. Can, or should, a 'body' that cannot be touched, that cannot be seen, that cannot be measured, that is not separable - οὐδὲ διαστατόν - and thus which is not conventionally 'human', be described as male? It is to suggest such metaphysical questions (and the limitations of ordinary language in describing and answering such metaphysical questions) that I have here departed from convention and used 'that Being' instead of 'him'. The term 'Being' also has the advantage that it avoids the gender bias implicit in translating θεός as 'god' given that 'god/God' implies a male entity.

There is also an interesting and perhaps relevant mention, in the second tractate of the Corpus, of the one, the being, who - like an artisan - constructs things: ὁ οὖν θεός <τὸ> ἀγαθόν, καὶ τὸ ἀγαθὸν ὁ θεός. ἡ δὲ ἑτέρα προσηγορία ἐστὶν ἡ τοῦ πατρὸς, πάλιν διὰ τὸ ποιητικὸν πάντων. πατρὸς γὰρ τὸ ποιεῖν. (Thus theos is the noble and the noble is theos, although another title is that of father because the artifex of all being. For it is of a father to construct.)

However, in terms of gender and Hellenic mythos and metaphysics, it is sometimes overlooked that Γαῖα, Earth Mother, in one of the Homeric hymns, Ἔῃς Γῆν Μητέρα Πάντων, is described as πρέσβιστος: the elder among beings, and the mother of the gods, θεῶν μήτηρ. Thus, while it might be of "a father to construct" it is "of a mother to bring forth life", to give birth to beings, including the gods themselves.

*presential.* πάρειμι. Presential - from the classical Latin praesentia - means "having or implying actual presence", as manifesting (as being presenced) in a locality or with an individual, and is thus more apposite here than the rather bland word 'present'. Cf. the use of 'presenced' in Ιερός Λόγος 2, et sequentia.

*One only.* ἐνὸς μόνου. A formulaic mystic phrase, implying uniqueness. Cf. ordinary usage in Plato, Crito 47, ἢ ἐνὸς μόνου ἐκείνου [...] ἐνὸς μόνου.

*thelesis.* θέλησις. Given what follows - τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶ τὸ σῶμα ἐκείνου, οὐχ ἄπτόν, οὐδὲ ὀρατόν, οὐδὲ μετρητόν, οὐδὲ διαστατόν - a transliteration to suggest something other than a human type 'will' or 'desire'; such as 'disposition'. That is, Being is predisposed to craft - to presence - being as beings: as immortals (deities), as mortals (humans) and otherwise, qv. Ιερός Λόγος, Poemandres 8 ff, and Poemandres 31: οὗ ἡ βουλὴ τελεῖται ἀπὸ τῶν ἰδίῳ δυνάμεων (whose purpose is accomplished by his own arts).

*formed*. As an artisan forms their artiselements, and thus manifests their skill, their artistry, in what they produce. That is, the artisan-creator has formed, crafted, being (all existence) as beings.

[5] In the Corpus Hermeticum, and in ancient Greek culture in general, χρόνος is not 'time', which translation imposes medieval and modern concepts on this metaphysical principles such as a particular causal regularity quantifiable in terms of hours and minutes - measured by a mechanism such as a clock - and quantifiable by means of a set calendar which consists of regular days, weeks, months, and years.

Similarly, ώρα (as for example in the Gospel of John, 5:39, ώρα ἦν ὡς δεκάτη) when translated as 'hour' is misleading, since the term 'hour' now imputes a particular causal regularity quantifiable in terms of period lasting sixty minutes with twenty-four of these 'hours' marking the causal passing of one terran day. However, in the Roman governed milieu of that Gospel the day was divided into twenty-four durations or periods and which durations depended on the length of daylight (and thus the season) at the particular location in question, with there being twelve durations of daylight and twelve durations of night. Hence the 'tenth duration' mentioned in that verse - whether it be the tenth duration of the daylight hours or the tenth duration of the twenty-four - would not necessarily equate to what we would term 'ten o'clock' in the morning and certainly would not equate to a tenth 'hour' lasting sixty minutes. In addition, it depends on when the first duration was measured from: sunrise, or sunset, or from 'the mid-point of the night'. Which has led to debate among scholars as to whether or not John in this Gospel is, in respect of ώρα, using Roman terminology for such periods, as well as to debates about whether the Roman durations were reckoned from 'the mid-point of the night' or from sunrise. If reckoned from sunrise, then allowing for latitude and seasonal variation, this 'tenth duration' was between mid to late afternoon. If reckoned from 'the mid-point of the night' then this 'tenth duration' was mid to late morning. Where the Roman 'mid-point of the night' does not equate to the modern 'midnight' (as measured by a clock) but to half-way between the hours of darkness at a particular location.

Hence it is apposite to generally translate χρόνος as either 'duration' or 'season', since those terms are appropriate in relation to ancient Greek texts where the duration between, for example, the season of Summer and the season of Autumn was determined by the observations (the appearance in the night sky) of certain constellations and stars, and where the duration of a day varied from place to place and from season to season even if it was linearly measured out in a particular location by means of a Greek or Roman sundial.

[6] Qv. VIII, 5, ὁ ἄνθρωπος κατ' εἰκόνα τοῦ κόσμου γενόμενος. That is, as the Poemandres tractate describes in terms of seven spheres, our ψυχή (psyche) is a re-presentation, a presencing, of the cosmic order.

In respect of the seven spheres, and the melding of opposites, cf. XI:6-7,

θέασαι δὲ δι' ἐμοῦ τὸν κόσμον ὑποκείμενον τῇ σῆι ὄψει, τό τε κάλλος αὐτοῦ ἀκριβῶς κατανόησον, σῶμα μὲν ἀκήρατον καὶ οὐ παλαιότερον οὐδὲν ἔσται, διὰ παντὸς δὲ ἀκμαῖον καὶ νέον καὶ μᾶλλον ἀκμαιότερον.

Ἴδε καὶ τοὺς ὑποκειμένους ἐπτὰ κόσμους κεκοσμημένους τάξει αἰωνίω καὶ δρόμω διαφόρῳ τὸν αἰῶνα ἀναπληροῦντας, φωτὸς δὲ πάντα πλήρη, πῦρ δὲ οὐδαμοῦ· ἡ γὰρ φιλία καὶ ἡ σύγκρασις τῶν ἐναντίων καὶ τῶν ἀνομοίων φῶς γέγονε, καταλαμπόμενον ὑπὸ τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνεργείας παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ γεννήτορος καὶ πάσης τάξεως ἄρχοντος καὶ ἡγεμόνος τῶν ἐπτὰ κόσμων·

Correctly consider and observe Kosmos as suggested by me and thus the beauty thereof, a body undecayable and nothing more eldern and yet always vigorous and fresh, even more now than before. Observe also the septenary cosmos ordered in arrangement by Aion with its separate aeonic orbits. Everything replete with phaos but with no Fire anywhere. For fellowship, and the melding of opposites and the dissimilar, produced phaos shining forth in the activity of theos, progenitor of all that is honourable, archon and hegemon of the septenary cosmos.

A similar melding of opposites is described by Heraclitus in terms of enantiodromia,

πάντα δὲ γίνεσθαι καθ' εἰμαρμένην καὶ διὰ τῆς ἐναντιοδρομίας ἡρόσθαι τὰ ὄντα (Diogenes Laërtius, ix. 7)

All by genesis is appropriately apportioned [separated into portions] with beings bound together again by enantiodromia.

[7] Tractate IV:5. The Monas (μονάς) refers to The One, that is to the primal - the first - theos, the artisan who "crafted the complete cosmic order not by hand but through Logos."

In respect of the English word monas, qv. John Dee, *Testamentum Johannis Dee Philosophi summi ad Johannem Gwynn, transmissum 1568* - a text included (on page 334) in Elias Ashmole's *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum, Containing Severall Poeticall Pieces of our Famous English philosophers, who have written the Hermetique Mysteries in their owne Ancient Language*, published in London in 1652 - who wrote "our Monas trewe thus use by natures Law, both binde and lewse", and who also entitled one of his works *Monas Hieroglyphica* (Antwerp, 1564), in which work he described (in Theorem XVIII) a septenary system somewhat similar to that of the Poemandres tractate.

[8] Our human culture of pathei-mathos is evident in *Studia Humanitatis* and may be defined as the accumulated pathei-mathos of individuals, world-wide,

over thousands of years, as (i) described in memoirs, aural stories, and historical accounts; as (ii) have inspired particular works of literature or poetry or drama; as (iii) expressed via non-verbal mediums such as music and Art, and as (iv) manifest in more recent times by art-forms such as films and documentaries.

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## **Epilogos**

### **A Modern Paganus Weltanschauung**

The paganus weltanschauung, ancestral to the lands of the West, that has emerged is one which, shorn of technical, Greek, and metaphysical terms, many may find familiar or already be intuitively aware of.

For it is a weltanschauung of we human beings having a connexion to other living beings, a connexion to the cosmos beyond, and a connexion to the source of our existence, the source of the cosmos, and the source - the origin, the genesis - of all living beings. Which source we cannot correctly describe in words, by any denotata, or define as some male 'god', or even as a collection of deities whether male or female, but which we can apprehend through the emanations of Being: through what is living, what is born, what unfolds in a natural manner, what is ordered and harmonious, what changes, and what physically - in its own species of Time - dies.

An awareness of all these connexions is awareness of, and a respect for, the numinous, for these connexions, being acausal, are affective: that is, we are inclined by our physis (whether we apprehend it or not) to have an influence on that which, or those whom, the connexion is to or from. For what we do or do not do, consciously or otherwise, affects or can affect the cosmos and thus the other living beings which exist in the cosmos, and it is a conscious awareness of connexions and acausal affects, with their causal consequences, which reason, perceivance, and empathy make us - or can make us - aware of. Which awareness may incline us toward acting, and living, in a noble way, with what is noble known or experienced, discovered, through and because of (i) the personal virtue of honour, evident as honour is in fairness, manners and a balanced demeanour, and (ii) the wordless knowing of empathy, manifest as empathy is in compassion and tolerance.

For Being is also, and importantly, presented - manifest to us, as mortals possessed of reason, empathy, and perceivance - through certain types of individuals and thus through the particular ways of living that nurture or encourage such individuals. These types of individuals are those who have empathy and who live and if necessary die by honour and thus who have nobility of character, with such character innate, or developed through *pathei-mathos*, or formed through a particular type of education, or through proximity to and/or admiration of those whose lives and deeds have revealed them to have such nobility of character. For it is the known living and the known deeds of individuals which reveal and/or which are the genesis of such noble character.

Such a developed paganus weltanschauung - in its ethos and its ontology, ethics, and epistemology, and thus with its virtues of personal honour and

empathy combined with a respect for the numinous - is quite different from Christianity and other revealed religions, and certainly does, in its noble simplicity and practicality, seem to be more human in physis, more balanced, and could well be more productive of a healthy personal ψυχή, than Christianity and other revealed religions.

Such a modern paganus weltanschauung may also be a means to reconnect those in the lands of the West, and those in Western émigré lands and former colonies of the West, with their ancestral ethos, for them to thus become, or return to being, a living, dwelling, part - a connexion between the past and the future - of what is still a living, and evolving, culture. Perhaps the future of that culture depends on whether sufficient individuals can live by the high personal standards of such a modern paganus weltanschauung.

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## Appendix

### From Aeschylus To The Numinous Way The Numinous Authority of πάθει μάθος

#### Pathei-Mathos

The Greek term πάθει μάθος (pathei-mathos) derives from The Agamemnon of Aeschylus (written c. 458 BCE), and can be translated as *learning from adversary*, and thus interpreted as implying that *wisdom arises from (personal) suffering* and that *personal experience is the genesis of true learning*.

However, this term should be understood in context [1], for what Aeschylus writes is that the Immortal, Zeus, guiding mortals to reason, has provided we mortals with a new law, which law replaces previous ones, and this new law – this new guidance laid down for mortals – is pathei-mathos. Thus, for we human beings, pathei-mathos possesses a numinous authority [2] – that is, the wisdom, the understanding, that arises from one's own personal experience, from formative experiences that involve some hardship, some grief, some personal suffering, is often more valuable than any doctrine, than any religious faith, than any impersonal words one might read in some book.

In many ways this is an enlightened – a very human – view, and is rather in contrast to the faith and revelation-centred view of revealed religions such as Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. In the former, it is the personal experience of learning from, and dealing with, personal suffering and adversity, that is paramount and which possesses authority; in the latter, it is faith that some written work or works is or are a sacred revelation from the supreme deity one believes in which is paramount, combined with a belief that this supreme deity has appointed or authorized some mortal being or beings, or some Institution, as their earthly representative, and who thus possess authority.

The Aeschylian view is that learning, and thus wisdom, arises from within us, by virtue of that which afflicts us (and which afflictions could well be the from the gods/Nature or from some supra-personal source) and from our own, direct, personal, practical, experience. The Aeschylian view – what we might call the way of pathei-mathos – can thus be considered to be numinous – that is, some-thing which lives, which is part of our own living, grounded in the personal reality of our immediacy of living, and thus is somewhat different from the religious attitude which asserts that wisdom, and indeed truth, can be found in revelation from some supreme deity, or imparted to or taught to us by someone in some position of authority, or discovered in or learnt from something 'dead', such as a book written by someone else.

## **Philosophy, Logic, and Modern Politics**

In essence, conventional, modern, philosophy seeks to find certain and particular causes for what exists, and to express certain general principles, by and through which knowledge and understanding of Reality, and existence, and thus wisdom, may be said to be obtained.

But, in a quite real way, conventional philosophy is founded upon the religious notion, the religious approach to wisdom mentioned above, for conventional philosophy is based upon abstractions [3]; upon abstract or idealized categories and ideas by and through which it is claimed we can acquire a knowing of what such categories and ideas are said to represent. All conventional philosophy has this approach - this ideation - by its very nature as an interior process of reflexion, by human beings, upon Reality and existence, and a process which requires the use of ideation and words and/or terms, and thence their collocation, to present to other human beings the result or results of such reflexion. Such ideation, such abstraction, is inherent in the finding of certain particular causes and general principles.

Exterior to this interior process, this ideation, there is logic, which may be defined as the dispassionate examination of the collocation or collocations of words and/or terms (or symbols) which relate, or which are said to relate, to what is correct (valid, true) or incorrect (invalid, false) and which collocation or collocations are considered to be or which are regarded as being, by their proponents, as representative of, or actually being, knowledge or a type of or a guide to knowing.

For logic, what is or what may be represented by such collocations (the content) is fundamentally irrelevant. What is relevant - what determines the logical validity of any any examined collocations - is the natural unfolding, or the form, behind and beyond all ideation.

Logic thus regards abstractions and ideas as irrelevant, as no guarantee of truth, and thus as no sure guide to a genuine knowing and to wisdom itself, and thus logic can be considered as a valid means whereby truth can be ascertained [4].

It may be objected, however, that the use of logic in philosophy makes philosophy a reasonable and a valid guide to Reality and thence to truth. However, what conventional philosophy does and has done is apply logic to theories that are derived from some abstraction or other, which application is basically irrelevant if the basal abstractions themselves are flawed. Furthermore, all such abstractions are in and of themselves flawed because they are, by their very nature, abstractions, divorced as they are from the numinous, from that which lives, and which unfolds in that natural way which Φύσις does. [5]

Thus, one might conclude that logic, rather than conventional philosophy, is a more valid means to truth and thence to knowledge, than the speculations and ideations of conventional philosophy.

Like modern philosophy, modern politics is founded upon abstractions - upon the religious way to knowledge and truth - but takes, and has taken, abstractionism much further, through the manufacture of ideologies, which are specific collocations of dogmatic abstractions.

In addition, modern politics is often or mostly based upon an appeal to the emotions, where individuals allow themselves to be persuaded by others (often through rhetoric or because of propaganda) and/or suspend their own judgement in favour of accepting that of someone else (some leader) or of some political organization or movement. That is, there is an identification with certain abstract political views, or some ideology, or some political organization or leader, in place of or instead of one's own judgement and in place of or instead of one's own unique, individual, identity deriving from one's own pathei-mathos.

In particular, there is or there comes to be, an immoral, an un-numinous, judgement of (and often a dislike or even hatred of) others based on what is perceived to be their political views, allegiance, or opinions, so that, for instance, a person is viewed not as an individual human being, but as an abstraction: as a Conservative, or as a fascist, or as a liberal, or as a Communist, and so on. This is same type of inhuman, immoral, prejudice that conventional religion often still produces and most certainly has produced, for millennia, and which ethnic, or racial, abstractions certainly still produce and encourage.

### **The Pathei-Mathos of Experimental Science**

In contrast to philosophy, experimental science seeks to explain the natural world - the phenomenal world - by means of direct, personal, observation of it, and by making deductions, and formulating hypothesis, based on such direct observation, with the important and necessary proviso, beautifully expressed by Isaac Newton, in his *Principia*, that

"We are to admit no more causes of natural things than such as are both true and sufficient to explain their appearances. To this purpose the philosophers say that Nature does nothing in vain, and more is in vain when less will serve; for Nature is pleased with simplicity, and affects not the pomp of superfluous causes."

The *raison d'être* of experimental science - unlike philosophy, religion, and politics - is knowledge acquired in a personal, direct, manner, without the intervention of abstractions, and this, as is the knowledge obtained by pathei-mathos, is numinous: a re-presentation, *sans* abstractions, which is living,

possessed of Life, and a practical guide to what actually is real, as opposed to the assumed, the imaginary, the abstract un-living reality that conventional philosophy, religion and politics present to us.

Hence, experimental science may be said to complement and extend – as a guide to Reality, knowledge and wisdom – the personal way of *pathei-mathos*.

The essential difference between experimental science and philosophy is that of abstractions: for philosophy, unobservable (theoretical) abstractions are the beginning of, and indeed the necessary and required basis of, our enquiry into the nature of Reality, and existence, and meaning; whereas for experimental science such abstractions, or theories, which may arise or which are conjectured, do so only on the basis of direct observation, are only and ever conjectural, temporary, subject to falsification by further practical observations, and are always rational, that is subject to logic (the rules of reasoning).

In addition, in philosophy, authority is the authority of some individual or individuals recognized by others for their theoretical contributions(s), so that, for instance, a scholarly paper in philosophy is of necessity replete with what other philosophers have said or written or thought or conjectured. For experimental science, authority lies in the evidence of observations and the application of logic.

#### **Toward A Philosophy of Pathei-Mathos**

We may suggest a 'numinous way', a new philosophy – the philosophy of *πάθει μάθος* – which is that of the way of a personal *pathei-mathos* combined with the way of experimental science, where we obtain knowledge about Reality, and may move toward certain truths about ourselves and existence, through direct practical, scientific observation of the phenomenal world, through the learning that derives from *pathei-mathos*, through the application of logic, and through an appreciation of the knowledge that the natural faculty of empathy provides, and which empathic knowing is different from, but supplementary and complimentary to, that knowing which may be acquired by means of the Aristotelian essentials [6] of conventional philosophy and experimental science.

Such a new philosophy is, or could be considered to be, a guide to what we understand as *σοφός*.

David Myatt  
2010  
(Revised 2015)

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#### *Footnotes:*

[1]

Ζῆνα δέ τις προφρόνως ἐπινίκια κλάζων

τεύξεται φρενῶν τὸ πᾶν:  
ὄν φρονεῖν βροτοὺς ὁδώ-  
σαντα, τὸν πάθει μάθος  
θέντα κυρίως ἔχειν.

If anyone, from reasoning, exclaims loudly that victory of Zeus,  
Then they have acquired an understanding of all these things;  
Of he who guided mortals to reason,  
Who laid down that this possesses authority:  
*Learning from adversity.*

Aeschylus: *Agamemnon*, 174-183

In many ways, *The Oresteia* represents the new wisdom that *pathei-mathos* can guide us toward; that the old cycle of tragedy and suffering can be escaped from by us appreciating, and acting upon, the understanding, the insight, that *pathei-mathos* provides.

[2] The numinous is what predisposes us not to commit ὕβρις. What manifests or can manifest or remind us of (what can reveal) the natural balance of ψυχή; a balance which ὕβρις upsets.

[3] Abstraction(ism) can be philosophically defined as the implementation, the practical application, of ὕβρις. An abstraction has its genesis in denotata, in naming 'a thing' which is considered to be separate, distinct, and representative of, or belonging to, some ideal 'form' or to some category of such named 'things'.

In respect of the numinous, and recalling *The Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, the *Antigone* and the *Oedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles, we could say that the numinous is what predisposes us not to commit ὕβρις - to not overstep the due limits.

As Sophocles wrote in *Oedipus Tyrannus*:

ὕβρις φυτεύει τύραννον:  
ὕβρις, εἰ πολλῶν ὑπερπλησθῆ μάταν,  
ἃ μὴ 'πίκαιρα μηδὲ συμφέροντα,  
ἄκρότατον εἰσαναβᾶσ'  
αἶπος ἀπότομον ὤρουσεν εἰς ἀνάγκαν,  
ἔνθ' οὐ ποδὶ χρησίμῳ  
χρῆται

"Insolence plants the tyrant. There is insolence if by a great foolishness there is a useless over-filling which goes beyond the proper limits. It is an ascending to the steepest and utmost heights and then that hurtling toward that Destiny where the useful foot has no use..." (vv.872ff)

[4] In many ways, the λόγος that is logical reasoning [cf. Sophocles, Oedipus Tyrannus, 583, εἰ διδοίης γ' ὡς ἐγὼ σαυτῷ λόγον] could be considered to be the opposite of an idea, of an abstraction,

τοῦ δὲ λόγου τοῦδ' ἐόντος ἀεὶ ἀξύνετοι γίνονται ἄνθρωποι καὶ  
πρόσθεν ἢ ἀκούσαι καὶ ἀκούσαντες τὸ πρῶτον

Although this naming and expression [which I explain] exists - human beings tend to ignore it, both before and after they have become aware of it. [Heraclitus, fragment 1]

[5] Cf. Aristotle Metaphysics, Book 5, 1015a

ἐκ δὴ τῶν εἰρημένων ἡ πρώτη φύσις καὶ κυρίως λεγομένη ἐστὶν ἡ οὐσία ἡ τῶν ἐχόντων ἀρχὴν κινήσεως ἐν αὐτοῖς ἢ αὐτά: ἡ γὰρ ὕλη τῷ ταύτης δεκτικῇ εἶναι λέγεται φύσις, καὶ αἱ γενέσεις καὶ τὸ φύεσθαι τῷ ἀπὸ ταύτης εἶναι κινήσεις. καὶ ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κινήσεως τῶν φύσει ὄντων αὕτη ἐστίν, ἐνυπάρχουσα πῶς ἢ δυνάμει ἢ ἐντελεχείᾳ.

"Given the foregoing, then principally - and to be exact - physis denotes the quidditas of beings having changement inherent within them; for substantia has been denoted by physis because it embodies this, as have the becoming that is a coming-into-being, and a burgeoning, because they are changelements predicated on it. For physis is inherent changelement either manifesting the potentiality of a being or as what a being, complete of itself, is."

[6] These Aristotlean essentials are:

- (i) Reality (existence) exists independently of us and our consciousness, and thus independent of our senses;
  - (ii) our limited understanding of this independent 'external world' depends for the most part upon our senses, our faculties; that is, on what we can see, hear or touch; on what we can observe or come to know via our senses;
  - (iii) logical argument, or reason, is perhaps the most important means to knowledge and understanding of and about this 'external world';
  - (iv) the cosmos (existence) is, of itself, a reasoned order subject to rational laws.
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