

**UNDERSTANDING AND DEALING WITH EVIL AND SUFFERING:
A FOURTH CENTURY A.D. PAGAN PERSPECTIVE**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of
Masters by Research in Classical Studies
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August 2008

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ABSTRACT

People of late antiquity were subjected to the universal and perennial human woes - injustice, affliction, adversity and pain - that cause suffering. The experience of suffering is subjective. There are however, common sources of and expressions of suffering in humans. The fourth century was a period of significant cultural and social changes which drew responses from pagans that not only reflected traditional knowledge but also engaged with new sets of ideas. This thesis examines the problem of evil and suffering as experienced by pagans of the fourth century of the Common Era.

Having received imperial sanction from the emperor Constantine after his conversion in 312, Christianity was gaining momentum in both membership and strength. The Graeco-Roman world had become one where Christianity, it seemed to some, had effectively surpassed pagan state cult. Against this backdrop of religious change, pagans had taken on a self-consciousness that engendered a rethinking of many traditional ways of coping with and explaining the evils of the world and the suffering that could result from them. Some rules and conditions had changed, so how and where could pagans seek explanation for, protection from or alleviation of their suffering? The study addresses this question by posing and responding to further questions. Firstly, how did pagans understand the presence of evil and suffering in the world? Secondly, from what sources, natural or supernatural, could they draw hope in the face of evil and suffering? And thirdly, what degree of autonomy could pagans claim in approaching the problem?

Religion and philosophy might be perceived by pagans to contain the answers to why there was evil and suffering in the world. The addition of science and the occult to religion and philosophy offered further ways through which pagans might seek to deal with the problem. By drawing primarily on extant literary evidence from the period as well as selected material evidence (predominantly pagan, but including some Christian), the research will trace the evolution of ideas regarding evil and suffering that pagan thinkers were bringing to the contemporary debate.

DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text of the thesis.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for photocopying and loan.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am extremely grateful for the committed supervision of Dr. Ron Newbold. I thank him for the unstinting support he has given me over the years that this research project has been evolving. His generosity of time and advice and his sharing of knowledge and resources have enriched and also smoothed the process of my research. To my 'second' supervisor, Dr. Han Baltussen, who has contributed insightful advice and on-going encouragement I also offer my sincere thanks. I am indebted to him for allowing me frequent access to his book collection. I value highly the regular discussions relating to the research project that have taken place between the two supervisors and me.

I also acknowledge the support network offered by the Classics department as a whole. The opportunity to present for open discussion amongst both teaching staff members and fellow students, aspects of a work in process has been of considerable value. Access to the resources of the well-maintained department library has also facilitated the progress of the research.

Thanks go to my fellow post-graduate candidates, Chris Cooper, Barbara Sidwell and Sariah Willoughby who have freely given assistance in different ways throughout the years of research. Through the mutual exchange of ideas and resources and with support and encouragement, they have all contributed to the project. Thanks in particular to Sariah for proofreading.

To my family and friends, who have both encouraged my efforts and made allowance for the occasionally distractive nature of the project, my heartfelt thanks.

Susanne Wallis

INTRODUCTION

The over-arching argument of this study aims to show what was characteristic of pagan response to quite novel challenges, particularly from Christianity, that compounded traditional existential concerns. The argument aims to produce a better understanding of how pagans, in understanding and dealing with the problem of evil and suffering, could still feel they had reason to believe that a semblance of the role of ritual and tradition in their lives could be preserved.

The purpose of the study is to explore an area of pagan thought of late Antiquity which, through preliminary readings, seems not to have been coherently studied - evil and suffering. The study aims to bring together evidence from discrete areas of Late Antique culture in order to offer an impression of how pagans of the period understood and dealt with the problem of evil and suffering

Justification of the study

The period of history referred to as Late Antiquity has gained a good deal of scholarly attention in recent decades. Two distinct themes emerge from writings on this broad topic. The first, of these is the 'decline and fall' (in the West) of the Roman Empire, the second is 'continuity and change'. The model for 'decline and fall', according to Lenski is a modern invention deriving from the assumptions brought by Gibbon to his study of the Roman Empire. Modern scholarship has brought into question these assumptions about the superiority of 'rationalism over mysticism, realism over idealism, moralism over relativism and classical civilisation over its medieval successors'. Modern treatment of the world of Late Antiquity has tended to avoid this earlier model of 'decline and fall' of the Roman Empire and instead, recent works 'engage the late antique world on its own terms'.¹

¹ What is generally being rejected here is the set of assumptions brought to the study of the Roman Empire by Gibbon but more specifically in the fields of culture, society, religion, art and literature than in politics and warfare (Lenski, 369). See Ward-Perkins (9 ff) for the current state of debate on the new vocabulary used for discussion about the themes of 'decline' and 'crisis' amongst scholars in Europe and America (along with a temporal framework for 'Late Antiquity').

Murray's use of the phrase 'failure of nerve' (1935, 123) to describe the mood of Late Antiquity and Dodds' description of the period as an 'age of anxiety' (1970, 3)² have given way to the more positive term 'continuity and change' proposed by Liebeschuetz (1979).³ The growth of this approach has evolved from amongst others, Brown's publication *The World of Late Antiquity* (1971) which was seminal in the change of direction for the study of the period that was taking place in the English-speaking world (below, 9). In the introduction Brown points to the disappearance of certain ancient institutions and the astounding new beginnings of the period where 'we are caught between the regretful contemplation of ancient ruins and the excited acclamation of new growth'.⁴ Recent scholarship has also been revising judgements previously passed on some of the thinkers (particularly Neoplatonist) concerned in the evolution of Late Antique religious and philosophical thought. Iamblichus (c.245-325, an important source for this investigation), often maligned for his strong interest in the occult, is emerging as a more serious philosopher than previously thought (Wallis 1972; Fowden 1981; Athanassiadi 1993; Clarke 2001; Edwards, 2006).⁵ Studies from the late twentieth century also assign a more serious role to the works of the emperor Julian and to the credence of his philosophical leanings (Athanassiadi-Fowden 1981; Smith 1995). In fact, there has evolved around Julian an area of scholarship designated as 'Julianic Studies' that explores every aspect of the emperor, his place in Late Antique history and his reception in literature to the present day. Synesius bishop of Cyrene is another fourth and early fifth century writer who, previously marginalised by historians and philosophers, has more recently enjoyed a revival in his fortunes.⁶ The nature of current scholarship on Late Antiquity in general, and more specifically the fourth century, suggests that the period is deserving of a positive reappraisal.

² Dodds (1970, 3) coined the phrase from W.H. Auden's *The Age of Anxiety: a Baroque Eclogue*, a tale of 'everyman's journey', to describe the material and moral insecurity of the age between Marcus Aurelius and the conversion of Constantine. Bregman (68) suggests that the period did indeed register more than its share of 'pathological phenomena'. See also, below, 21 n.62.

³ Murray (1935, xiii) borrowed the expression 'failure of nerve' from J.B. Bury. It was used to describe what Edwards (2006, 127) refers to as the 'delusive science and Stygian chicanery that disfigured religious practice in the later Roman world'. Murray does however (125) state his intention to indicate how this 'period of religious history, which seems to be broken, is really continuous.

⁴ P. Brown 1971, 7.

⁵ See further Shaw (1999, 573-4 & *nn.* 20-21) for recent scholarship on Iamblichus.

⁶ Fowden 1985, 281.

Scope and limitations of the study

The topic under discussion lies within a broad area of study regarding the period of time, the geographical, cultural and social areas covered. In order to narrow and maintain the focus and for the purpose of sustaining a clear path of investigation, the scope and parameters applying to the research need to be well established.

The general period of Late Antiquity is commonly held by historians to range from as early as the third century extending to the seventh century.⁷ As stated in the title of the thesis, the temporal parameters for this study place it mainly within the fourth century. However, the investigation actually reaches retrospectively to the third century and occasionally beyond for the purpose of tracing earlier philosophical ideas that inform those current in the designated period. Thus, the works of the philosophers Plotinus (c.204-270 AD) and Porphyry of Tyre (c.232-303 AD) are taken into consideration. Geographically and culturally, as stated, the topic under consideration covers a broad area. The Late Roman Empire covered a vast area. It encompassed not only a wide variety of terrains but also of ethnic populations and their cultures. From Gaul and Britain in the west, across North Africa to Asia Minor in the east, the peoples of the Empire spoke in languages ranging from Celtic and Punic to the local dialects of Asia Minor to the Syriac of Syria. Religious beliefs and forms of worship were similarly broad in variety. Within this geographical and cultural spectrum of Late Antiquity there were few boundaries to be negotiated. The exchange of literature and language encouraged a uniform system of education and because of this, religious philosophies, both Christian and non-Christian, informed by the same rhetoric, developed along similar lines. The spectrum of cultures has relevance to the process of this investigation because its study contributes to understanding inter-cultural influences and syncretisms that reveal both traditional and revised pagan religious beliefs.

There are limitations to this paper which are mainly self-imposed by the researcher. With regard to sources used, there exists visual evidence that will be given due consideration where appropriate to add further dimension to certain points made in the development of the argument. Examples of artistic representation - a collection of Late Antique marble

⁷ P. Brown 1971, 7. Chuvin (4-5) cautions against attaching too much importance to dates, despite their necessity. Dodds (1970, 3) also draws our attention to the 'untidiness' of history as an obstacle to setting firm dates.

portraiture of philosophers from Aphrodisias for instance- will be used where they can be seen to add weight to the point being made. Overall, however, this dissertation does not include an exhaustive investigation of material evidence, but rather relies on textual evidence.

The choice of textual evidence as the main area of investigation is in itself a limiting factor. A research project dealing predominantly with primary literary sources will naturally tend to reflect the views and experiences of the educated classes of society and, within that sector, predominantly male contributors. This inevitably excludes those groups within society who did not leave a written record (aside from epigraphic material) and consequently limits the area of study largely to the urban rather than rural population.

A further limitation applied to this research project relates to the consideration that must be given to both pagan and Christian views on the problem of evil and suffering. Inevitably, in parts, the study will need to examine both sides of the debate. One of the most significant catalysts for changes in thought during late Antiquity was the growth of Christianity. The ideas that were being expressed in late paganism and early Christianity have become entangled. Because of Christianity's eventual triumph, and the large amount of extant literature by Christian apologists, pagan religious beliefs have often been evaluated by Christian standards. The main focus of this research however, as the title indicates, is the pagan point of view, and although this view will at some points be set beside the Christian, the dissertation is not overall a sustained comparative study. Late paganism deserves to be studied on its own terms, and that is what this investigation aims to do.

Definitions

There are some frequently-used terms in the work that require clarification. Firstly, we should look at the term 'pagan' which is used throughout this dissertation and is in itself problematic. Scholarly works that deal with paganism will necessarily offer information on the etymology of the word. In this dissertation the word is used to define traditional Greco-Roman non-Christian religious culture - its beliefs and practices - but the term carries significant meaning in the relations between Christians and pagans. The term 'pagan' could be seen as representing traditional Hellenic culture which Christians embraced as the

foundation for their learning. Or conversely, ‘pagan’ could be used in derogatory fashion to imply a degree of ignorance (stemming from the shared root of the word with *paganus*–peasant) or to represent a set of religious beliefs that was, for the most part, abhorrent to Christians.⁸

There is another term used throughout the following work that requires some explanation - the word ‘magic’ which I place in tandem with ‘religion’. It is difficult given our modern understanding of the terms, to distinguish between the two as understood in ancient usage where they were used to designate varieties of ritual practices. So we need to suspend modern notions of the term in order to discuss its importance in ritual actions performed by those seeking health, protection or salvation in the fourth century.⁹ The words used in the ancient world for magic – *maleficium*, *veneficium*, *goetia* for instance- were only vaguely definable, yet its perceived power was real.¹⁰ The ancients had specific and ever-changing views on magic. Generally, it could be applied to something ‘nefarious and illegal’ used to bring about harm to others.¹¹ The workings of magic involved the use of formulas and rites. A number of practices - divination, and oracular consultation, for example - that we might now label magic were for the ancients accepted as religion and were utilised in the pursuit of the goals of immortality, salvation and devotion, protection, success and healing.¹²

Review of literature: primary sources

The fourth century was a time of lively debate between different philosophical and religious schools of thought expressed through traditional rhetorical methods. The genres of historiography, biography, panegyric and hagiography all had their place within Late Antique literary tradition and provide valuable sources for this research. Both pagan and Christian writers were well aware of the importance of clarifying their positions. Each party was vulnerable to the polemic of the other and needed to act, in some instances pre-

⁸ See Chuvin (7-9) for an analysis of the term in the context of fourth century thinking.

⁹ Stratton, 303.

¹⁰ Lenski, 219.

¹¹ Pharr (269) uses the term ‘antisocial’ to describe the kind of magic universally outlawed in the ancient world.

¹² Stratton, 303. See also, Edwards (2006, 128) on the ‘forbidden’ magical arts opposed to official public divination. See further, Trzcionka (5ff) for a review of scholarship regarding ‘magic’.

emptively, in order to maintain their standpoint. The period can claim to be the best documented century of antiquity. We have at our disposal documents whose abundance and variety are unique in all of antiquity. There are accounts by historians or participants in the events giving multi-sided views, official acts, legal texts, inscriptions, correspondence, autobiographies and biographies (hagiographies). To this can be added on one hand the anti-pagan polemics of Christian apologists and, on the other, pagans' own expression of their beliefs.¹³

Pagan contributions to the collection of evidence include *Res Gestae* by the historian, Ammianus Marcellinus (c.330-391). This work, written in the tradition of ancient, large-scale histories and noted for its relative objectivity, is of central importance to the reconstruction of many aspects of Late Antiquity and has been continuously utilized and commented on by historians of that period. His stance on paganism (albeit understated) draws on past tradition and a tendency to continuity.¹⁴ The *Historia Nova* of the late fifth century pagan historian Zosimus, in contrast to Ammianus', is openly prejudiced against Christians, but worth considering in its context as a later perspective on paganism of the period under study. Zosimus' history borrowed heavily from that of the pagan writer Eunapius (written c.400).¹⁵ The two latter histories provide a control for factual errors and omissions (particularly in the area of Christianity) in Ammianus' work. Eunapius' biographical work, *Vitae Sophistarum* (*VS*) albeit a defensive pagan text, is also a useful source for religious and philosophical thinking of Late Antiquity. Its emphasis is on the supernatural leanings of contemporary pagan philosophers.¹⁶

The extant writings of the philosophers who had the greatest impact on thinking in the fourth century Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblichus, are important sources for showing the development of ideas that led to the dominant Late Antique philosophy of Neoplatonism. The writings of Plotinus, edited by Porphyry at the beginning of the fourth century (301),¹⁷ discuss his theories on the nature of evil, and reveal his thoughts on how man should

¹³ We owe the preservation of documents such as these to, in particular, the Byzantines of the tenth-century renaissance who recognised the importance of this period (Chuvin, 11-12).

¹⁴ Davies, 3.

¹⁵ Eunapius' history is extant only in fragments, but Zosimus followed it faithfully in his history (Lenski, 3).

¹⁶ See further, Momigliano 1987, 175.

¹⁷ MacKenna, xxxv.

conduct his spiritual life in order to deal with suffering.¹⁸ Porphyry's own writings which include a treatise called *On Abstinence from Eating Animals* (*De Abst.* written c. 268-70) further explore the philosophical ideas of the role of asceticism in relation to man's mystical union with his God. The direction taken by Iamblichus infused these philosophies with Eastern mysticism, derived in part from the *Chaldean Oracles* (a second century source outlining the hierarchical powers of the cosmos). In *De Mysteriis* (*De Myst.*) Iamblichus admits the validity of material objects as appropriate for attracting the presence of divinities.¹⁹ His set of ideas opened up the way to the practice of theurgy, or 'god-working' by pagan holy men, a practice that could easily be construed as the working of magic for mundane purposes. The emperor Julian (331-363), a follower of Iamblichian philosophy, was also a prolific writer. His extant material includes letters, hymns and invectives against Christians, and is important to this investigation because it demonstrates Julian's attempt at a philosophical rationalization of ancient pagan religion. A treatise written by Sallustius (c. 363)²⁰, *Concerning the Gods and the Universe* (*Conc. the Gods*), possibly commissioned by Julian, is a most useful exposition of (predominantly) Neoplatonist views on a range of philosophical and religious issues. The work addresses the problems of the nature of divinity, correct worship and the nature of evil and sin, punishment and salvation. It represents a religious outline that contains not only a system of thought for the thinking man and philosopher, but also endorses popular objects of worship. In Murray's opinion, it appeals to the 'ignorant and humble-minded' and never condemns or ridicules.²¹ It is an important treatise that seems not to have attracted the attention it warrants from researchers of late antique pagan religious matters.²² An equally

¹⁸ Edwards (2006, 2) suggests that Neoplatonists would not have accepted the prefix Neo- that we use now; Neoplatonists regarded themselves as true followers of Plato's teaching. Dodds also points out that Plotinus did not know that he was a Neoplatonist- he thought of himself as simply a Platonist (1960, 1).

¹⁹ *De Mysteriis* was written by Iamblichus (the fictional priest Abamôn) in response to Porphyry's epistle to the (fictional) Egyptian Anebo in which he seeks to obtain a 'more perfect and copious solution of the doubts proposed in his epistle in relation to 'the theological mysteries' and 'the characteristics of the beings superior to man' (Taylor, xxiv-xxv). See Clarke (2001, 4) for discussion of what type of work *De Myst.* is. See further Fowden (2001, 86) for the context of *De Myst.*

²⁰ See Bowersock (1978, Appendix III, for discussion of the possible identity of Sallustius (or Salutius). See also Murray (1935, 179-80) and Clarke (1998, 347-50) on the identity of the author of *Concerning the Gods and the Universe*.

²¹ Murray 1935, 193.

²² The treatise is translated (with commentary) into English by Nock (1926) and Murray (1935). Scholars have not made exclusive studies of this treatise with the exception of E. Clarke (1998). Rather it appears as a small part in broader studies of the period. Athanassiadi (1992a, 159), suggests that Porphyry's *Letter to Marcella* was composed for a similar purpose.

underestimated source is the Christian writer, Firmicus Maternus. Although we do not know his birth and death dates, his astrological work *Mathesis* (written 334-337)²³ is an important work for the study of Late Antique astrology. And of equal if not greater importance for the study of the period is *De errore profanarum religionum* (*err. prof. rel.*) addressed to Constantius and Constans (c.346-350).²⁴ The latter not only reveals the nature and extent of pagan practice in the author's time (particularly sacrifice and participation in the mysteries) but also, in its recommendation of enforced conversion, heralds a new tone in Christian literature.²⁵ Firmicus' modern translator C. Forbes claims that:

Those that seek to know the status and views of late paganism in the fourth century find that Firmicus is our chief and on some points our only source; his only real rival is the Neoplatonist Sallustius.

Forbes 1970, 32

Libanius (314-394) a teacher of rhetoric in Antioch provides valuable information through his letters, orations and particularly his autobiography (*Oration 1*), of how an educated Late Antique pagan conducted his life in the public sphere and in private. His value as a social commentator of his times has experienced varying popularity since the time of his writing to the present and currently, thanks to twentieth century historians like P. Petit and A.H. M. Jones, has been rediscovered.²⁶ As a public spokesman, Libanius expressed contemporary attitudes to the persecution of pagans in his plea for toleration and freedom of worship, *Pro Templis* (*Or. XXX*). In private, Libanius worshipped his gods, used divination and had a working knowledge of the occult, and utilized these practices to minimise his suffering in times of adversity.

The Christian point of view is represented in this study mostly by reference to the works of Augustine, and to Gregory of Nazianzus from the group of church writers known as the Cappadocian fathers. These writers commented and exerted influence on a range of

²³ Forbes 1970, 5.

²⁴ Forbes 1970, 11.

²⁵ Forbes 1970, 16-17. Maternus' attack on paganism is written in similar style to that of Arnobius of Sicca's *Adversus Nationes* written at the turn of the fourth century. This refutation of paganism in contrast with earlier apologetics reflects a Christianity that is now on the offensive, confident of ultimate success (Nock 1933, 259). See also Forbes 1970, 13ff.

²⁶ Norman 1969, vol. 1, xlviii.

issues relevant to this research. We can look also at Synesius, philosopher-bishop of Cyrene who maintained a strong attachment to pagan (or ‘Hellenic’) culture. His familiarity with, and love for pagan philosophy made his conversion to Christianity a slow process and there is in fact some doubt as to whether he really did convert.²⁷ Synesius offers a particular slant on pagan religious and philosophical ideas as he syncretises them with the Christian.

Throughout the dissertation there are references to the *Codex Theodosianus*. This collection of laws of the later Roman Empire compiled between 429 and 438 is useful because of its thematic and chronological presentation and for tracing religious changes and more specifically the status of paganism in the period under study.²⁸ The origin of most of these laws is the western centre of the empire, although the east is also well represented.²⁹ However, as Averil Cameron points out, the Code merely consists of a set of prescriptions; it does not tell us what actually happened. The rhetorical style of the documents is ‘tortuous’; getting laws to the public was a ‘hit-or-miss’ affair and ignorance of the law was common.³⁰

Review of literature: secondary sources

The second half of the twentieth century saw a growth in the study of the later Roman Empire, now commonly referred to as Late Antiquity. This growth has evolved from amongst others A.H.M. Jones’s *History of the Later Roman Empire: a Social, Economic and Administrative Survey* (1964) and Peter Brown’s publication *The World of late Antiquity* (1971). The latter is a broad study of religious, cultural change in the period, and as such is invaluable in providing a concise history of religious and philosophical trends in Late Antiquity set in the broader political and economic context.

Historians John Matthews and Averil Cameron have more recently produced texts which give a wide perspective of the period under investigation. Matthews’ work *The Roman World of Ammianus* (1989) and Cameron’s textbook, *The Later Roman Empire A.D. 284-*

²⁷ See Bregman, 60-61; Van den Berg, 30.

²⁸ Caution is required in approaching this source. Presentation of the laws and compliance with them was uneven as we shall see later. See Mirrow and Kelley, 263-266; Hunt 1993, 143-158.

²⁹ The *Codex Justinianus* was to correct this imbalance in the sixth century (Lenski, 8).

³⁰ Averil Cameron 1993, 27.

430 (1993) give a wide perspective of all aspects of the period under investigation. A recent addition from Simon Swain and Mark Edwards, *Approaching Late Antiquity* (2004) centres on questions about those factors present in High Roman Empire society that developed and expanded in Late antiquity and ‘what was new in the latter period and distinct from what preceded.’ Contributions to this volume come from ‘well-known experts on Roman history and culture’ (1) whose essays map pagan responses to transformations that were taking place between the second and fourth centuries. Historians Robin Lane Fox (*Pagans and Christians*, 1986) and Ramsay MacMullen (*Paganism in the Roman Empire*, 1981 and *Christianity and Paganism in the fourth to eighth Centuries*, 1997) have approached Late Antique religious topics broadly but from different perspectives. Both have contributed works that address the inter-relationship between paganism and Christianity. MacMullen’s works concentrate on the affairs of the masses, the ‘superstitious’ folk. Lane Fox’s approach is more conservative and his subjects are the urban elite. These historians have each worked from different ranges of material evidence to provide texts which offer broad religious background material from the second and third and reaching into the fourth centuries. Late Antique religious and philosophical thought was closely connected. The subject of philosophy and the philosophers of the period (particularly Neoplatonism) is well covered by Wallis (1972) and more recently by A. Smith (2004), Dillon and Gerson (2004) and M. Edwards (2006). These authors provide detailed studies of Late Antique philosophical thinking and how it had evolved to reflect contemporary ideas on mankind’s relationship with the divine realm.

Another author who must be cited is E.R. Dodds. His early work on theurgy and Neoplatonism was illuminating. *Select Passages Illustrating Neoplatonism* (1923), contains tracts from the key Neoplatonists contemporary with the early Christian years- Plotinus, Porphyry, Proclus and others. An article ‘Theurgy and its Relationship to Neoplatonism’ (1947) is a thorough explication of this particular philosophical school of thought which held a prominent position in Late Antiquity. Further, his book, *Pagans and Christians in an Age of Anxiety* addresses the tension between pagans (reasoned conviction) and Christians (blind faith). The debate continues.³¹ Although Dodds’ views

³¹ See, for instance, Morgan & Wilkinson, 202.

on the reasons for the triumph of Christianity over paganism are not necessarily relevant here, the problem of anxiety is.

There is also available a wide range of monographs which focus on the subject matter of this dissertation. The more specific areas of paganism of the period are well represented by P. Athanassiadi and G. Fowden. Athanassiadi focuses particularly on religious and philosophical matters of Late Antiquity. Pagan religion and philosophy are also central to Fowden's works. On the topic of the pagan emperor Julian, Rowland Smith (1995) has replaced the traditional biographical approach to the emperor (Browning 1976; Bowersock 1978; Athanassiadi-Fowden 1981) with a thematic approach which brings into question a number of *données* of Julianic studies. Smith's approach to Julian is through exegesis of his writing and Julian's religious and philosophical leanings are framed in a way that helps us to understand his mentality and its implications for the study of Late Antiquity.

The questions under consideration

(i) How do pagans understand evil and suffering?

The nature of suffering evokes in humans a quest for meaning. The understanding of a problem goes a long way to finding a solution for it. But the lack of sense in suffering can put it beyond the limits of practical reasoning. Logical explanation can appear inadequate in the face of the reality of suffering in a difficult world. It shatters everyday orientations to the world and impresses upon us the need for other-worldly (magical, religious, ecstatic) meanings for experiences that otherwise defy explanation.³² In the light of contemporary belief systems, where might pagans seek meaning for their experiences that could not be explained pragmatically?

(ii) In the face of suffering, what gives hope?

How broad was the range of strategies pagans of late antiquity could muster to deal with the problem of evil and suffering? Religious and philosophical ideas mingled with the scientific and the occult. Eastern influences were added to the rituals of traditional Graeco-

³² Morgan and Wilkinson, 204.

roman cults and religions. The dynamic nature of paganism allowed for adaptation to the challenges of the changing face of the fourth century.

(iii) How much autonomy do pagans claim in overcoming suffering?

The powers of fate could be perceived to hold men and women in their grip in a pattern of strict determinism. But people also believed there were steps that could be taken to thwart these powers. To what extent did pagans feel that they could take control of their own destinies?

(iv) The sub text- Christianity: pagan response and reaction to change

The fourth century contained its own peculiar set of problems resulting from the imperial sanction of Christianity from the time of Constantine. Laws published during this time (although not necessarily enforced) indicate attempts by authorities to control pagan activities. Although generally conversion to Christianity was uneven throughout the empire, the religion's growth and spread impacted on pagan ideas and practice. During the course of the fourth century Christian attitudes to pagans and their practices deteriorated from one of measured tolerance to one which tacitly condoned, and even explicitly exhorted, outbreaks of violence against pagans and their places of worship. Pagan religious practice took on a different face and philosophical thought also evolved to accommodate the contemporary world-view.

Structure

The thesis is structured in four chapters. Chapter one, 'Altar of Victory', outlines changes to state religious procedure and the impact that this was having on the relationship between the people of Rome and their gods. The imperial act of removing the altar of victory from its place in the curia could be seen to symbolise the changing status of paganism in the fourth century. The investigation of the significance of this and related acts and the responses they drew from contemporary pagan public figures serve as a preface to the thesis. These responses represent pagan anxieties about the state of their relationship with their divine protectors. For pagans, the importance of correct traditional extrinsic workings of their religion in securing divine protection and averting divine wrath could not be over-estimated.

The following chapters deal with the body, the mind and the soul respectively, each viewed through the aspect of pagan thought and behaviour in response to evil and suffering. If, as was commonly believed, the source was wrathful gods, religion and philosophy could offer knowledge of how best to placate the gods. Neither angry gods nor evil daemons, it was commonly held, were inclined to act against the state or individual that performed correct ritual or maintained piety. But perhaps the gods were not to blame. Malicious humans might act in a number of ways, employing natural or supernatural means against their fellow humans to bring about suffering. Or the natural world itself could bring imbalance to the environment or to humans. Explanation and understanding of the forces thought to bring about suffering went a long way to determining how pagans might manage their lives in the face of evil and suffering.

Chapter two, 'Healing the Body', explores how pagans understood and responded to the sufferings associated with physical (and also mental) sickness. Causes and meaning, prevention and healing of these ailments are discussed within a framework of religion, philosophy, science and magic. Christian views on the subject come under discussion here for the purpose of illustrating religious beliefs that could determine peoples' understanding of sickness and their motivation for seeking particular types of healing.

Chapter three, 'Healing the Anxious Mind', investigates those forces that pagans of Late Antiquity perceived to play a role in the shaping of their lives and how they might endeavour to control these forces. Fears and dreads that people associated with the unknowability of future events could compromise peace of mind. Escape from the clutches of fate might be made possible by seeking foreknowledge through a wide range of divinatory practices and taking evasive action to avoid potential misfortunes.

The fourth chapter, 'Physician of the Soul', begins with an investigation of fourth century pagan ideas about the relationship between the body and the soul. This leads to discussion about how pagans might conduct themselves in matters of purification as a pre-requisite for mystical union with the divine (and hints at a growing pagan concern with morality). The discussion addresses not only spiritual fulfilment in this life but also issues concerning the afterlife and notions of wrong-doing and punishment. The approach to these subjects encompasses the study of contemporary religious and cult practices and the philosophical

ideas that underpin them as well as the concept of the philosopher as ‘physician of the soul’.

CHAPTER 1

THE ALTAR OF VICTORY

Introduction

The people of Rome had for centuries believed that their city and the entire Roman Empire were under the divine protection of their gods and this assumption manifested in Roman religious doctrine and practice.³³ Divine power was conceived of as having direct involvement in human affairs. Innovation and intervention in the workings of civic ritual were not welcomed particularly in the conservative circles of the West where the empire with its centre at Rome retained the ancient state religion. The Roman senator Symmachus (340-402), voicing this pagan attachment to ancient tradition in religion at Rome, maintains that ‘a high regard for tradition is a great thing’ (*Relatio* 3.4). Bad times for Rome and her people could be attributed to the falling away of piety; neglect of the gods could only usher in disaster.

When Constantius II ordered that the Altar of Victory be removed from the Senate House at Rome in the spring of 357, he launched an ongoing series of inter-related events. This initial removal of the altar, Symmachus tells us, was short-lived; ‘[it] was right that the act of the late emperor Constantius did not remain in force for long’ (*Rel.* 3.4). It would be safe to assume that it was Julian who returned the altar to the curia during his reign (361-363)³⁴ where it remained until 382.

The date of the placement of the Altar of Victory in the curia at Rome can be traced to an inscription that records its dedication by Augustus on August 28 in 29 BC in celebration of Rome's victory over Egypt at the Battle of Actium.³⁵ The altar had long played a significant role in the secular and religious proceedings in the senate and stood for Rome's

³³ Matthews 1973, 176.

³⁴ Lee, 111; Croke & Harries, 29, *n.9*; Casseau, 30; Bowersock 1986, 303.

³⁵ Pohlsander, 590.

triumph over her adversaries. It became customary for senators to pay homage to the statue of the cult goddess Victory at this altar³⁶ when they entered the senate.³⁷

We may assume that the position of the altar (and also the statue of Victory)³⁸ in the senate house ensured regular and frequent acknowledgement of it by the senators going about their business. It was at the altar that pagan senators would traditionally make offerings and libations to the goddess Victory and take their vows of allegiance to the emperor. This attention in turn guaranteed the ongoing maintenance of the vital relationship that existed between Rome and the gods. From this relationship, it was believed, flowed the guarantee of protection by the gods for Rome and her people. On the basis of *religio* men were bound to the gods by the mutual exchange of obligations of services very much like the balanced human relationship of *amicitia*. The renunciation of these obligations on the part of the state, in breaking the delicate balance of *amicitia* between the gods and men, could be seen by someone like the senator Symmachus to be potentially leading to inevitable and disastrous consequences.³⁹

The series of events involving the altar's serial removals and replacements during the latter part of the fourth century serve as an indicator of the significance that this monument held for senators both pagan and Christian. It stood, in the first instance, as representative of the official sanction and support of pagan cult by the Roman government.⁴⁰ Secondly, the altar as the receptacle of sacrifice in pagan rite made it particularly offensive to the Christian members of the senate.⁴¹ In the West there was, in contrast to the East where the senate was predominately Christian, still a considerable proportion of Christian senators and the

³⁶ Victory was also represented here by a statue to which senators offered frankincense and libation upon entering the curia (Pohlsander, 593). The statue of Victory's significance differed from that of the altar and seems not to have shared its fate. Symmachus suggested 'desacrilization' of the statue: 'If she cannot be honored as a god, at least let her name be honored' (*Rel.*3.4) (Casseau, 30). The figure of Victory (as a symbol of empire) was common-place in Roman monumental art and coins (Pohlsander, 588-9) and could represent an angel to Christians and a goddess for pagans (King 1961, 22).

³⁷ Pohlsander, 593.

³⁸ There is some dispute over the exact position of the altar (and the statue) in the senate chamber (see Pohlsander, 592) but we can assume that it was easily accessible given its function. Unfortunately, Pohlsander tells us, there is no description of the altar in current sources (591).

³⁹ Matthews 1973, 177.

⁴⁰ Pohlsander, 597.

⁴¹ In the minds of Christians, not only did the emanations from blood sacrifice attract evil daemons, but sacrifice remained in the Christian imagination as a reminder of tortures inflicted on them by their persecutors. The issue of sacrifice had, in times of persecution, been used to discomfit Christians (Bradbury 1994, 129).

curia was a shared space for both Christian and pagan members of the senate.⁴² In view of the sensitivity of contemporary Christian attitudes to pagan cult, the altar's presence and function in the senate must have been of some embarrassment to and an indicator of the gulf between Christian and pagan religion.

The disruption of divine protection by the next removal of the altar by Gratian in AD 382 gave reason for consternation and fear amongst the elite pagans of Rome. It represents a distinct change in direction of Christian attitudes to paganism from the previous imperial façade (at least) of tolerance to a more overt lack of tolerance. Disturbance of the established rituals could be perceived to leave Rome and her people vulnerable to the wrath of the gods. Gratian's act was to draw a request from a delegation of the senate for reinstatement of the altar and we shall return to the content of that document below.

Gratian's removal of the altar was not an isolated event. Two further acts that were closely bound together - his refusal to take the pontifical robe and his withdrawal of state funding for religious cult⁴³ added weight to the action of removing the altar. The offering of the pontifical robe by the college of Pontiffs to the emperor on his accession to the throne was part of the sealing of the role of *Pontifex Maximus* taken by every ruler from Numa Pompilius to Valentinian.⁴⁴ By taking the title *Pontifex Maximus* the emperor bound himself to the pagan priesthoods and became responsible for their financial support. The subsidies for maintenance of temples and for funding priesthoods were traditionally a public matter and had to derive from state funds in order to be effective - funding could not be a private affair.⁴⁵ These public subsidies went to support the colleges of priests, which included the Pontiffs, Augurs, Flamens and Vestal Virgins whose ceremonies had protected the Eternal City since the days of the kings.⁴⁶ The cults were the public expression of the relationship between the Roman people and their gods. A contemporary

⁴² On the question of Christian majority in the senate in 384, see P. Brown 1961, 1-11; Sheridan, 188 ff; Barnes 1995, 135 ff.

⁴³ Alan Cameron (1968, 96) puts these events in 383. Much has been made of the implications of the withdrawal of state funds for the members of the senatorial aristocracy who have been portrayed as 'money-grabbers'. See Croke and Harries, 39, n 22. Ammianus makes derisive remarks about the extravagant lifestyle of Roman senators (14.6).

⁴⁴ There has been some debate on the chronology of Gratian's repudiation of the robe. See Alan Cameron 1968, 96-102, for a detailed examination of this.

⁴⁵ Alan Cameron 1968, 99.

⁴⁶ Williams & Friell, 59. Symmachus (*Rel.* 3.15) claims the funds were diverted to pay the wages of baggage-men and porters of the imperial transport system (Matthews 1975, 204).

source tells us that ... ‘In Rome are seven very famous free-born virgins, who perform the rites of the gods for the safety of the city according to the custom of the ancients, and who are called “Vestal virgins”’.⁴⁷ The correct maintenance of this relationship was entrusted to secular institutions in the form of the senate and magistrates and to religious bodies as supervised by priests and organised through the various colleges which were supported by the emperor as *Pontifex Maximus*. The Emperor Gratian's removal of the altar, ostentatious refusal of the robe and discontinuation of state subsidies for state cult signified a distancing of the emperor from the traditional state religion.⁴⁸ He was ending the period of official toleration of traditional pagan practices dating back to Constantine.⁴⁹ To part with an association that had proved successful for so many centuries could only be seen as unpatriotic, imprudent, and even dangerous.⁵⁰

The pagan response

Relatio 3

The first senatorial delegation to Gratian did not receive a hearing. A second request (there were four in all) in 384 took the form of an oration. Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, Roman senator, *Pontifex Maior*, orator and man of letters was, once again, the man chosen to head the delegation that delivered to the emperor Valentinian II a plea for the restitution of the altar to the curia. The plea, known to us as *Relatio* or *Memorandum 3 (Rel.3)*, was composed by Symmachus and it addresses, in the first instance, the issue of religious toleration and secondly, the dangers inherent in tampering with traditional pagan ritual that had served for hundreds of years to ensure divine protection of Rome and her population from all manner of misfortunes. The oration contains the well-known words of Symmachus:

⁴⁷ Woodman, 41.

⁴⁸ Matthews 1975, 204.

⁴⁹ See Errington, 309 ff for a study of interpretations of Constantine's policy of toleration of paganism. The *Theodosian Code* reveals that in 389 the first recorded changes in the legal status of pagan holidays were made. This is consistent with Gratian's aim to disestablish pagan cult and prefigures the 395 abolishment of pagan holidays by the emperors Arcadius and Honorius (Salzman 1990, 236). See Drake 7-11 (with *n.13*) on intolerance both pagan and Christian.

⁵⁰ Bloch, 215.

It is reasonable to regard as identical that which we all worship. We look upon the same stars; we share the same heaven; the same world enfolds us. What difference does it make by what system of knowledge each man seeks the truth? Not by one road alone can man arrive at so great a secret.

*Rel. 3.10*⁵¹

The first request had been intercepted by Ambrose; the second having been read at the court of Valentinian II attracted a rebuttal from Ambrose (*Ep. 18*).⁵² However, such was the non-partisan tone of the *Relatio* that, Ambrose tells us (*Ep. 72 [17].8.*), when it was read out at the court of Milan there were Christians who were willing to speak in Symmachus' support.⁵³ The delivery of the oration won some success for Symmachus at the court of Milan, but the request was not granted.

The role of Ambrose is significant in the course of events involving Symmachus' pleas. His background was similar to that of Symmachus - he was well versed in secular affairs having been a provincial governor in Italy before his election to bishop. He was well educated and the son of a Praetorian prefect, so he was well equipped intellectually and socially to be a fair match for Symmachus and this is demonstrated in his rebuttal of Symmachus' *Relatio*. Ambrose's influence over the Christian emperors of the era - Gratian, Valentinian II and Theodosius I - is well documented.⁵⁴ His direct association with them brought him into the political arena and allowed him to participate in directing the imperial responses to the pagan pleas for religious equality. It was, according to O'Donnell, Ambrose, not Symmachus who made the issue one of pagans versus Christians escalating the rhetoric in order to intimidate the young emperor Valentinian.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Symmachus was possibly inspired by Themistius' *Oration 5* which exalts the principle of religious tolerance and was delivered soon after Julian's death (363), (Ruggini, 1987, 202). See also Ando, 179-180. Vanderspoel (25) suggests a common source, probably Porphyry. There is a similar theme in Maximus of Madaura in correspondence with Augustine in 390 (*Epp. 16 & 17*) (Ando, 190-191).

⁵² This brief exchange between Symmachus and Ambrose has been nominated as one of the most celebrated religious debates in the Roman world. See Sozomen, *Hist Ecc. 5.3* (in Pohlsander, 594); Averil Cameron 1993, 73; Williams & Friell, 59; Matthews, 1975, 205 & 210. Ambrose's letter represents a revolution in Christian attitude to toleration of paganism (Marcus 2007, 51).

⁵³ McLynn, 166.

⁵⁴ See McLynn, xix-xxii for modern scholarship on Ambrose.

⁵⁵ O'Donnell 1979, 76.

At the centre of Symmachus' *Relatio* is the conviction that for the state to secure the continued support of the gods in its enterprises, it must duly offer them its support expressed by the correct performance of public ritual.⁵⁶ The emphasis here is on the correctness of the rituals performed. Symmachus as *Pontifex Maior* would have known the time-honoured ways of sustaining the protection of the gods. As a Roman senator of Late Antiquity Symmachus' duties covered a broad range of matters both religious and secular and to the pagan way of thinking the two areas were difficult to separate. The *Relatio* addresses both of these elements. Symmachus asks the question:

Where will we swear our adherence to your laws and pronouncements? By what religion will a deceitful mind be made to dread giving false testimony? All things are indeed filled with God, and no place is safe for the perjured, but to be urged in the very presence of religious forms has great power in producing a fear of sinning'

Rel. 3.4

The assumption that all that mattered in pagan cult was the outward performance of rituals is partly derived from the writings of Christian apologists such as Tertullian. Yet from as early as the fifth century BC, the gods had been believed to discern between the prayers and sacrifices of the morally sound or unsound.⁵⁷ This tenet is implicit in Symmachus' plea.

As Symmachus points out the actual fiscal consideration may have been trivial to the emperor, but, on principle, the subsidies were of paramount significance.⁵⁸ If these expenditures were curtailed, resulting in the neglect of proper relations with the gods, the state would suffer and this theme, as we have seen above, is central to Symmachus' *Relatio* 3.⁵⁹ For the state to secure the continued support of the gods in its enterprises, it must duly offer them its support, expressed by the correct performance of public ritual at the expense of the state.⁶⁰ The usurper Eugenius' attempt, during his brief period of power at Rome (392-394) to subsidise pagan cult at Rome as a personal gift from his own pocket was

⁵⁶ Matthews 1973, 176.

⁵⁷ Dickie 2001, 436-438.

⁵⁸ Matthews 1975, 208.

⁵⁹ Alan Cameron 1968, 99.

⁶⁰ Mathews 1973, 176.

deemed inappropriate by traditional pagans. Covert *ab homine* grants, as had long been recognised, were meaningless in this context and Eugenius' initiative has been derided accordingly by modern scholars.⁶¹

Symmachus' *Relatio* further contains a barely-disguised threat of the consequences of the continued depriving of the priestly colleges of their ancient legacies (their 'moderate maintenance' and 'just privileges'). From deeds such as this, Symmachus points out, have arisen all the misfortunes of the Roman race - poor harvest and famine have 'disappointed the hopes of all the provinces'. He claims that these disasters were no result of natural causes, nor the influence of the stars, but occurred through the sacrilege that has been committed (*Rel.3.14*).⁶²

In 383 the empire was burdened by wide-spread crop-failure and famine, Gratian was murdered and the usurper Maximus attempted to seize the throne.⁶³ In a letter to his brother Flavianus, Symmachus bemoans the famine that has struck the West, voicing the opinion, held by many like-minded pagans that the gods are punishing Rome for the attack on the national religion: 'Gods of the fatherland pardon our neglect of sacred things! Banish this dreadful famine' (*Ep. ii, 7*).⁶⁴ The removal of the subsidies seriously undermined the validity of pagan cult and subsequently threatened perceived divine protection of the Roman people.

The pleas of Symmachus may have been ineffectual in changing the attitude of the Christian emperors to pagan practice but a decade later in 393 his colleague, the praetorian prefect Virius Nichomachus Flavinius, fared differently. He was handed the opportunity to revive some important pagan practices via the brief sojourn of the usurper Eugenius in Italy at this time and is commonly held to be the leader of what has, to some scholars,

⁶¹ McLynn, 345-6. O'Donnell (1979, 79) for example, suggests that Eugenius proposed to 'launder' the money needed for the restoration by providing it through private hands.

⁶² See Lenski, 385, Appendix C, for a list of the extraordinary disasters that occurred between 358 and 368.

⁶³ Pohlsander, 594.

⁶⁴ Matthews is prepared to locate this food shortage to 383 or 384 (1973, 177). Ammianus (14.6.19) writes about foreigners being 'banished in headlong haste from the city [Rome] because a famine was expected' (in 384 according to Croke & Harries, 112, n.31).

constituted a brief and energetic 'pagan revival'.⁶⁵ The revival was short-lived. Evidence for the supposed pagan activities that blossomed at the time comes from a poem written by an anonymous Christian and referred to as *Carmen contra paganos* (or, *Carmen adversus Flavianum*).⁶⁶ The wide variety of gods that Flavianus attempted to resurrect,⁶⁷ their festivals and processions,⁶⁸ his attempts to convert Christians to paganism and his return of the public apparatus of divination to prominence are all exposed in this invective.⁶⁹ The restoration of the temple of Hercules at Ostia, motivated, in all probability, by the presence of an oracle at the site,⁷⁰ demonstrates further the interest the Romans of this late stage of paganism still held in matters of divination (Chapter 3, below). The final reinstatement of the altar of Victory was to come during Eugenius' brief command. His religious ambivalence allowed him, in a gesture of conciliation to the pagan senators of Rome, to return the altar to its place. This reinstatement was brief - Theodosius presumably removed the altar having suppressed the 'pagan revolt' of 394.⁷¹

Pro templis

Several years before Symmachus had made his plea, Libanius of Antioch had voiced his own concerns regarding Christian attitudes to paganism. In the sense of being a representative of intellectual pagans, he could be considered to be the Oriental 'counterpart' of Symmachus at Rome in his call for imperial consideration in the matter of pagan cult.⁷² The two men use similar rhetorical styles to persuade Christian emperors to show more tolerance towards non-Christians.⁷³ Libanius' plea (*Or. XXX* or *Pro Templis*)⁷⁴

⁶⁵ Bloch, 228. O'Donnell sees the revival in part as a half-hearted attempt by Eugenius to buy support in Italy (1978, 139-40); and also as 'a scholar's fantasy and no more' (1997, 78). See Alan Cameron 1984, 45 ff for evidence of a revival of letters in Late Antiquity.

⁶⁶ Matthews (1970, 464-479) discusses authorship of this poem and acknowledges its historical value. See also Bloch, 230. Or was it directed at Vettius Agorius Praetextatus? McLynn, 165.

⁶⁷ Iuppiter, Saturnus, Mercury and Vulcan; Mithras-Sol, Magna Mater and Attis; Liber, Trivia, Sarapis, Anubis and Isis; Ceres and Proserpina; a broad mix of traditional and oriental deities (Bloch, 230 & n. 69 & appended chart).

⁶⁸ *ibid* Isis and Magna Mater.

⁶⁹ Bloch, 232.

⁷⁰ Bloch, 235.

⁷¹ Pohlsander, 596. The revolt it would seem was more so-called than real. It was later historians like Theodoret who escalated the importance of the event.

⁷² T. Jones, 57. Bradbury suggests a cautious approach to Libanius' writing as an historical source for social and religious issues for he is 'powerfully persuasive and capable of considerable distortion' (1994, 128, n. 29).

⁷³ Bradbury 1994, 128. In 363-4, Themistius had set a precedent in this 'theory of toleration' in his address to the Christian emperor, Jovian (Lee, 112).

to the emperor Theodosius I was written (c. 386) in response to a set of problems peculiar to the rural areas of the eastern part of the empire. Despite Theodosius' apparent toleration of pagan cult, Libanius finds it necessary to express the fears of his fellow-pagans.⁷⁵ Bands of monks, apparently under direction from the Prefect for the East, the Spanish Catholic, Maternus Cynegius,⁷⁶ by persecuting those who may be perceived to be offering sacrifice to the gods, are striking terror throughout the countryside leaving the local pagans like 'ship-wrecked mariners, swept from the ships in which they sailed' (*Or.* XXX.23).⁷⁷

Libanius further suggests that bands of black-robed monks are not only despoiling rural shrines, but also putting at mortal risks the priests who might put up resistance:

... they assault the temple carrying wooden beams, stones and iron tools or even without these items with their hand and feet. Then they are an easy prey; even though they destroy the roofs, raze the walls to the ground, pull down the statues and tear down the altars, the priests have to keep silent or they have to die.

Or. XXX, 8⁷⁸

These occasional outbreaks of destruction of pagan shrines (from about 380 onward) are revealed by reports and archaeological evidence throughout the empire.⁷⁹ Destruction of pagan temples was, in some provinces (the temple of Zeus at Apamea for instance), carried out by armed troops using military techniques to collapse the buildings.⁸⁰ Libanius' plea reflects a growing undercurrent of Christian intolerance of pagan practice and places. Although these attacks were carried out by groups, for the most part, acting outside secular law, slowness of government bodies to control the violence could be seen as tantamount to their sanction.

⁷⁴ In Norman 1977, vol. 2.

⁷⁵ Williams & Friell, 58.

⁷⁶ Chuvin, 59&62.

⁷⁷ This opens an area of tension between pagans and Christians. The monks take the law into their own hands rather than going through the magistrate for imposing penalties (*Or.* XXX, 25). This accelerated attitude of violence towards pagans and their religious sites by Christians impatient of imperial tolerance is also evident in the writings of Firmicus Maternus (below, 101, *n.* 432).

⁷⁸ A wider survey of written evidence, according to Sauer, 159, confirms the impression that such acts were comparatively scarce occurrences and did not have church approval. But Fowden (1978, 66 *ff*) cites evidence of some backing from bishops.

⁷⁹ Marcus 2007, 52.

⁸⁰ Williams & Friell, 58.

Pro Templis hints at an undercurrent of fear and anger from pagans who are experiencing the loss of their shrines as places where they could seek counselling from the gods, for instance, those suffering illness who have been denied access to their healing god Asclepius (*Or.* XXX.39). Libanius draws attention to the plight of the pagan farming communities. He writes of the protection given to men by the gods from the very beginnings of time in return for the proper forms of worship:

... the first buildings to be erected after the [city] wall were the shrines and temples, for they [the people] believed that from such governance they would have the utmost protection also. ... Temples, Sire, are the soul of the countryside: they mark the beginning of its settlement, and have been passed down through many generations to the men of today. In them the farming communities rest their hopes for husbands, wives, children, for their oxen and the soil they sow and plant. An estate that has suffered so [from the loss of its temple] has lost the inspiration of the peasantry together with their hopes, for they believe that their labour will be in vain once they are robbed of the gods who direct their labours to their due end.

Or. XXX.4, 9, 10

The argument from pagans that Constantine's acceptance of Christianity was to blame for all the recent ills of the empire was brought to the fore and the debate intensified following the sack of Rome in 410 by the Visigoth, Alaric. This event would see these anxieties escalate into a heated exchange between Christian and pagan writers each laying blame on the others' impieties for the catastrophe. The idea had a history. In the third and early fourth centuries the blaming of Christians had been easily refuted by apologists such as Tertullian (and also Arnobius and Lactantius) who points out that calamities have always brought suffering to mankind (and deservedly so). Late in the fourth century when the bishop Porphyry arrived at Gaza to take up his position there (395) he could be blamed for the current drought that was being experienced in the area (*Vita Porphyrii*, 17-20).⁸¹

Augustine in *De civitate Dei* (*De civ. Dei*, written 413) took up Tertullian's argument. He was aware that in the minds (and words) of contemporary pagans, 'drought and Christianity go hand in hand' (*De civ. Dei*, II.3). In attempting to set the record straight

⁸¹ Van Dam, 11.

regarding pagan accusations, he devotes the first part of his work to a defence of Christianity against such charges. He censures the pagans for attributing the calamities of the world to the prohibition of worship of the gods. In 416 Augustine commissioned his research assistant, Orosius, to compile a compendium of all the past ills recorded in history before the time of Christ ('while the worship of the false gods was universally practised') that had to date plagued mankind (*De civ. Dei*, II. 3). In the dedicating of his book, *Historiarum Adversum Paganos*, Orosius states that:

You [Augustine] bade me to discover from all the available data of histories and annals, whatever instances past ages have afforded of the burdens of war, the ravage of diseases, the horrors of famine, terrible earthquakes, extraordinary floods, dreadful eruptions of fire, thunderbolts and hailstorms and also instances of the cruel miseries caused by murders and crimes against man's better self.

*Hist. adv. pag.*⁸²

A poem written two decades after Gratian's removal of the altar dramatises the conflict over the removal of the Altar of Victory from the senate house. In this poem, *Contra Symmachum* (written, 402) Prudentius, rebutting the pagan claim that the Roman military defeats were the result of abandoning the gods, condemns the folly of putting faith in a winged woman of victory rather than in the strengths and skills of human warriors and Almighty God.⁸³

The idea of the 'decline and fall of the empire' forms the main thesis of Zosimus' *Historia Nova* written at the turn of the 6th century. Zosimus takes as central to his fourth century history Constantine's acceptance of Christianity and the subsequent abandonment of the gods by pagans.⁸⁴ Christianity is one of the reasons he cites for the decline. In the early fifth century pagans claimed that it was the Christians who were to blame for the sack of Rome because they had caused the withdrawal of correct ritual for the pagan gods which

⁸² J.W. Woodworth (Trans.) 1936 in Mommsen 1951, 352-53.

⁸³ Prudentius *Contra Symmachus* II.17-38: '... a virago with combed hair, hovering bare-footed with a robe girded with a belt and flowing over swollen breasts'. Translation in Croke and Harries 1982, 74.

⁸⁴ Goffart, 416-417

led to neglect of the gods thus bringing about their anger.⁸⁵ Christians likewise claimed that the pagans were to blame for incurring the wrath of the Christian God by refusing to accept Christianity.⁸⁶

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined some changes in state religious procedure and the way they impacted on pagans. The significance of the removal of the Altar of Victory cannot be overestimated. On a political level, the altar represented a vital link between the Roman State and Roman religion, standing as tangible reminder of Rome's great past and her hopes for the future⁸⁷ based on the pagan understanding that the virtuous piety of the Romans toward the gods had entitled them to conquer the empire. The removal of the altar of Victory from the curia, and more particularly the cancellation of the public cults of Rome, represents the first practical expression of the changing of policy by Christian emperors. The aim of this act was to completely separate the Roman state from the old state religion.⁸⁸ The pagan response to this change is articulated in Symmachus' *Relatio*. In the East, Libanius' *Pro templis* represents pagan sensibilities regarding the curtailment of some of their religious practices.

These responses offer a profile of religious thought arguing from the past,⁸⁹ emphasising reverence for tradition and the ancient hallowed ways of doing things. Ancient society was not so much concerned with whether gods exist, but rather, how they would impact on the human world, how they should be understood to act and more importantly the effect and means of their placation - and the consequences of failing to do so.⁹⁰ But further, these pleas voice the authors' concerns for individual pagans. Disturbance of the norm in this case can only invite suffering on a large scale.

⁸⁵ Ammianus cites the bold invasion of Mainz by the Alamanni that took place during a Christian festival (27, 10. 1-2) thus undermining Christianity's claims to supplant paganism in its role of protecting the empire (Davies, 245).

⁸⁶ Maas, 26.

⁸⁷ Sheridan, 187.

⁸⁸ Liebeschuetz 1979, 303.

⁸⁹ Wardman, 152-3.

⁹⁰ Davies, 2.

CHAPTER 2

HEALING THE BODY

Introduction

In order to deal with disease, we need to know what it is. Disease must also have an origin, and it is the origin which to a large degree determines its character and treatment.

Means 1925, 68

The subjects of disease and also of health, both physical and mental, were open to considerable speculation as can be seen from extant writings of the late fourth century. Not only physiological disease but also psychosomatic illness and mental disturbance begged explanation and treatment. The approach to the problems could be from religious, scientific and philosophical positions. The boundaries between these positions could appear where they did exist, to be moveable and open to negotiation and redefinition.⁹¹ The impact of social, political and economic changes taking place in the empire offers a partial explanation for a change in the contemporary 'medical landscape'.⁹² Christian writers of late antiquity were developing and expressing their own views about how sickness and suffering should be understood and dealt with. From within their doctrine there emerged areas of tension which set Christian and pagan attitudes to healing at odds.

This chapter, divided into two parts, addresses the way in which pagans of the fourth century understood and responded to the evil of disease. The first part investigates how pagans might explain what entity or force, internal or external, supernatural or natural, could be held responsible for their diseases both physical and mental. The second part proceeds to explore the nature of pagan response to these problems as demonstrated by how people sought protection from, prevention and healing of disease. The aim of this chapter is to elicit what was characteristic of how pagans sought to avoid, cure or at least alleviate the sufferings that resulted from physical and mental ailments. In the process of

⁹¹ Nutton 2004, 313.

⁹² Nutton 2004, 293

this investigation, the Christian perspective on the subject particularly those attitudes that most differ from or reveal tensions with pagan beliefs will receive due attention.

In antiquity, men and women, regardless of their religious persuasion, held the belief that a possible cause of the evils that plagued people, including ill health, was God or the gods who could appear to be indifferent if not hostile towards humans.⁹³ We have already seen in Chapter 1 the importance attached to the proper honouring of the gods. The idea of divine wrath manifested as punishment had endured from the epic narratives of Homer and from Greek tragedy although in the late fourth century this belief was less commonly held amongst pagans. Daemons (the bad ones) could also be held accountable for taking possession of men's bodies (or minds) and causing sickness. Or maybe the malady was brought about by the malicious act of a human rather than a divine agent - a witch or sorcerer or anyone capable of (and having motivation for) casting curses or spells designed to bring about the discomfort, or worse, of his or her victim. Or one could look to the stars. Astrology was held to influence the lives of man in every way including his health and astrology and medicine had long been linked. If the stars can be the cause of illness - and this is plausible if one should accept the theory that the stars are themselves causes - perhaps the stars can also indicate the means to cure it.

Medical practitioners of the late fourth century, by framing disease within the principles of the natural world, could locate the cause of most diseases by employing theories involving the balance and imbalance of the internal bodily humours (along with Aristotle's 'primary qualities' of hot, cold, dry and moist).⁹⁴ And for the most part physicians treating the symptoms of disease based their procedures on these theories.

An awareness of the importance of a healthy lifestyle was ingrained in Greek thought through the multifunctional institution, the gymnasium. A tract from the Hippocratic Corpus, *Regimen*, describes how the best outcome of good health might be restored to the body by a proper balance between food intake and exercise.⁹⁵ A band of Late Antique pagan philosophers held the belief that the body as the 'container' of the soul needs to be kept in a state of health, particularly by those involved in the contemplative life. Although

⁹³ Means, 68; Lloyd, 119.

⁹⁴ Pettis, 118.

⁹⁵ Holowchak, 388.

the arguments regarding the health and purity of the soul are mostly founded in esoteric matters (below, Chapter 4) there was a consensus among many fourth century philosophers that a correct diet, one that is frugal if not strictly vegetarian, contributes to a life free of physical or mental disease.

Urban planning with relation to sanitation also plays a part in an investigation of the occurrence and prevention of disease in Late Antiquity. There is evidence that the typical Roman city of the era contained systems of waste disposal that, given the density of population of the larger cities, offered a relatively healthy environment in which to live.⁹⁶ But the frequent plagues that descended upon cities were still events that could decimate the population and there was not yet a medical procedure in place to prevent or treat this kind of onslaught.

The perceived power of prayer and vows offered to the gods gave the religious some hope in warding off ill health as well as alleviating it. For the superstitious, amulets bearing spells or incantations as well as the employment of human manipulation of occult powers, was, broadly speaking, considered valid action to take in the protection from and the healing of disease. In the fourth century however, the imposition of edicts sent out by Christian emperors against particular pagan religious practices was a factor that limited the ways in which pagans could access some of their traditional religious healing practices.

This chapter will demonstrate primarily that pagans suffering from the effects of illness were aware of a broad range of resources offering protection from, prevention of and healing for their ailments. Religion, science and magic provided the means of dealing with their disorders. Armed with this range of remedies, pagans could approach their problems on their own terms (and with few limitations) without qualm of conscience. For Christians the search for healing by earthly means could be overshadowed by the heavenly orientation expounded in Christian doctrine.

⁹⁶ Morley, 198.

1. Understanding illness and its origins

Blaming the supernatural

The traditional pagan belief that the gods were responsible for inflicting disease on humans as retribution for some (possibly unknown) offence (most probably impiety) still lingered in the fourth century. The idea of sickness inflicted on humans as punishment for wrongdoing was not new in Late Antiquity. The wrathful gods of Homeric epic had made it clear although, as Lloyd observes, in Homer there is ‘no direct link between pain, sickness and the gods’ and we should not be tempted to take this theme as a universal one - not all diseases, individual or epidemic, are caused by the divine wrath of the gods.⁹⁷ The Old Testament tells of the wrath of Yahweh and its expression through a broad range of sufferings inflicted on mankind. The Christians' God too, could inflict the pain and suffering of disease not only on individuals but also on whole communities. This idea coloured how some Christians understood and responded to disease. Both pagan and Christian thinkers acknowledged the possibility that illness might be a form of punishment sent by a deity or deities and this impacted on their modes of and attitudes to healing. The notion of suffering as punishment did carry into fourth century Christian doctrine⁹⁸ where those who sinned against the church invited punishment. The combination of sin and suffering was a belief inherited from Jewish doctrine. The apostle Paul had left the legacy of bearing a thorn in his flesh which he believed had been sent by god as a reminder that such pain and suffering is in some way beneficial.⁹⁹ In the fourth century church writers such as Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom and Augustine preached of the spiritual strength to be gained from suffering illness.

For the most part however, in pagan accounts of cure in late antiquity, the idea of divine retribution is mostly absent. The emphasis rather is on the belief that the gods (Asclepius, for instance) may, if well propitiated, choose to intervene and facilitate recovery without showing any concern for the cause of the illness.¹⁰⁰ Illness as a divine punishment is not the rule; the punishable offence would be a specific cult one, not a personal moral

⁹⁷ Lloyd, 16-18.

⁹⁸ Nutton 2004, 284.

⁹⁹ Corinthians II, 12, 7-8.

¹⁰⁰ Nutton 2004, 283.

failing.¹⁰¹ Errors of conduct against the gods could include (often inadvertent) ritual impurity, failure to fulfil a vow or causing damage to any holy place.¹⁰² We must not overlook the moral component in piety or respect for the gods. Porphyry for instance in a letter to his wife, Marcella (*Ad. Marc.* 14, written c. 302) insists that the gods favour worshippers of unblemished moral character and that, ‘nowadays they believe that it does not suffice for the holiness of the sacrifice to throw a glittering garment around an unclean body’ (*De Abst.*, II.19).¹⁰³ Further, according to Porphyry, an inscription at Epidaurus states that: ‘Pure must be he who enters the fragrant temple; purity means to think nothing but holy thoughts’.¹⁰⁴

Many pagans believed that they lived in a world full of daemons, both good and evil, evolving from the usually helpful nymphs or trouble-making satyrs of myth. The changeable nature of these daemons meant that they could either be blameworthy or praiseworthy and their activities deemed ‘acceptable and unacceptable supernatural exercises’.¹⁰⁵ The *Chaldean Oracles*, a source cited by pagan thinkers of the fourth century (such as Iamblichus) in its outline of the hierarchy of cosmic powers, suggests that the kind of daemons that are responsible for evils such as sickness and disease belong at the lower end of the order.¹⁰⁶ Iamblichus, who incorporates daemons in his own cosmological system, attributes danger to the evil ones. The presence of daemons he writes, ‘renders the body, indeed, heavy, afflicts with diseases ...’ (*De Myst.* II.6).¹⁰⁷ Libanius claims that daemons working evil through the rites of magicians can ‘ estrange friends, bring on poverty, put out eyes, paralyze tongues, make men deaf, bind their feet, cripple their arms, waste their bodies, and do much other evil’ (*Declamation* 41.29).¹⁰⁸ The world of daemonology provided a ground where Christian polemic could, by turning all pagan deities into evil daemons, force pagans to defend the presence of good daemons in the

¹⁰¹ Nutton 1985, 47.

¹⁰² Nutton 2004, 284.

¹⁰³ The thought had a long history in philosophical and non-philosophical contexts. See Dickie 2001, 440.

¹⁰⁴ Edelstein 1998, T.318. See also Edelstein 1937, 223 who sees this inscription as evidence of Asclepius as the representative of rational Greek theology in opposition to demonic religion, magical rites and purifications.

¹⁰⁵ Flint 1999, 289.

¹⁰⁶ Duffy, 84.

¹⁰⁷ Yet Iamblichus asserts that these daemons cannot harm anyone with a ‘pure soul’. See below, 86 & 98.

¹⁰⁸ Several items in this ‘catalogue of iniquities’ could be illustrated by extant magical texts (Bonner 1932, 41).

cosmos.¹⁰⁹ The healing of humans supposedly suffering from the effects of daemonic possession was also a vehicle through which a Christian holy man could demonstrate the power of the rites of exorcism and of prayer. To such an end, an accusation levelled at Ambrose suggests that he had ‘bribed people to pretend that they were troubled [mislead] by evil spirits’.¹¹⁰ Plotinus, however, had refuted the claims of Christians that diseases are ‘Spirit Beings’ and that they can be expelled by formulae. He recognises that the pretence of exorcising such daemons by magical powers is likely to have popular appeal, but the intelligent are unlikely to be persuaded that diseases arise from anything but physical causes.¹¹¹

Libanius understands that magical powers can not only be used to cure disease, they can also conceivably be employed by human agents to inflict disease. There is a well documented incident in Libanius’ life that is illustrative of his attitude to magic and reflects contemporary understanding and attitude to the use of magic in the context of inflicting harm - in this case physical illness. In 386 at the age of 70, Libanius suffered from a particularly debilitating recurrence of migraines and gout. The severity of the ailments was such that he could hardly perform his teaching duties, feared for his reason and even prayed to heaven for death (*Or.* I.243). His doctors could not find a remedy and suggested that he ‘seek a cure elsewhere’ (below, 42). He had a dream which seemed to portend ‘spells, incantations, and the hostility of sorcerers’ (*Or.* I. 243-50) (below, 80). A chameleon was mysteriously discovered in his classroom. Lizards held particular significance for magic activities in antiquity. The way its body was twisted and mutilated suggested that it had been arranged by human hands - its head tucked behind its back legs (headache); one front leg missing (gout) and the other closing its mouth (silence). Libanius could interpret (or imagine) from this misshapen object the kind of sufferings that his

¹⁰⁹ It was a Christian commonplace (and acknowledged by some pagans) that the pagan practice of blood sacrifice attracted evil demons. See Bradbury 1994, 129 and *n.* 32. Sallustius in *On the Gods and the Universe* denies the existence of evil daemons. Since Christians considered all pagan deities to be evil daemons, he was perhaps strengthening pagan defence against Christians (Nock 1926, lxxix), although this idea was common amongst Neoplatonists - Iamblichus, for instance.

¹¹⁰ Grey, 16 & *n.* 109 (Paulinus *Vita sancti Ambrosii* 15).

¹¹¹ Edelstein 1937, 218.

enemies might want to inflict on him. Following the discovery, according to Libanius, his symptoms disappeared.¹¹²

Astrology: a guide to diagnosis and prognosis

One could look to the stars which it was commonly believed influenced the lives of men and women in every way including their health. Astrology and medicine had long been linked, for example in early Egyptian lore. This association was carried through second century Greek medical theory and into the fourth century in the astrological work of Firmicus Maternus (334-7 AD). The idea of acknowledging the stars as signifiers of sickness and its course was still prevalent in the late fourth century. In some peoples' minds it was not out of the question that the stars themselves were the cause of illness rather than mere signs, although in this period, the idea of the stars as actual causes was still open to debate.¹¹³ The physician practicing in a society which held these beliefs would be well advised to take significant astral signs into consideration when determining diagnosis treatment and prognosis for his patients.

In the second century, Galen's writings demonstrate his familiarity with astrological technicalities. Astrological writings commonly contained a medical component and medical astrology (and its associated discipline, physiognomy) was to be found in the Galenic corpus. It was, according to Nutton, due to Galen's concession - that some astrological theories were acceptable - that astrological medicine was able to penetrate into Late Antiquity.¹¹⁴ Galen promotes the idea that astrological observation, taken at the time of a person being taken ill, can not only predict the curability of the disease but also the conditions that will have caused the disease. The two arts (or sciences) - medicine and astrology - could thus be linked. By casting a horoscope and observing his client, the astrologer could ascertain his state of health and consult the stars for guidance in choosing the preferable course to take in curing the disease. Galen gives the example where a particular formation of the moon with Cancer and Saturn indicates that the disease has

¹¹² This incident is well described and analysed by Bonner 1932, 34-44.

¹¹³ In the fourth century few people believed in the stars as cause but the matter was still under discussion amongst pagan and Christian thinkers. Plotinus (*Enneads* 3.1.5) suggests that the stars may act as a guide for human lives but cannot act as causes by themselves.

¹¹⁴ Nutton 2004, 266-68.

been caused by bathing or getting cold, the solution is warm remedies.¹¹⁵ In c. 330 the pagan astrologer Firmicus Maternus had written a lengthy treatise on astrology.¹¹⁶ He wrote of the sufferings and unhappiness connected with disease; 174 of the passages in *Mathesis* deal with predictions of disease including mental disorders, physical deformities and loss of faculties (sight, hearing and speech). Amongst the cures offered he includes ‘cauterising, incantations, ordinary remedies and (most often) seeking divine aid’.¹¹⁷

Libanius had gained an understanding of the movement of the stars and their relation to disease and he expresses a contemporary attitude to the practice of astrology and also affirms the idea that astrology plays a role in the course of disease.¹¹⁸ When the sight in one of his eyes weakens, he claims that ‘the astrologers who make everything depend on the courses of the stars, declare that the sight will not be lost since Ares has moved into a more favourable position’ (*Or.* I. 282).¹¹⁹ But Libanius was also aware of the dangers of consulting an astrologer (or any soothsayer) during Valens' reign when ‘every soothsayer was his [Valens'] foe’ (*Or.* I. 171). This state of affairs is also recorded by Ammianus who relates a number of charges carried out by Festus,¹²⁰ proconsul of Asia, against anyone suspected of involvement in the magic arts including the casting of horoscopes (29.2.26).¹²¹ During this particular period the view was that a man suffering from ill-health consulted the astrologer at his own peril.

The Philosopher's way to good health

Plotinus regards the state of health as natural:

It must be remembered that sensations of the ugly and evil impress us more violently than those of what is agreeable and yet leave less knowledge as the residue of the shock; sickness makes the rougher mark, but health, tranquilly present, explains itself better; it

¹¹⁵ Galenic Corpus, *Prognostics from Taking to One's Bed*, 19, 530 (in Nutton 2004, 267).

¹¹⁶ Firmicus Maternus' *Mathesis* shows strong influence of Marcus Manilius' important first century philosophical work *Astronomica* (Goold (Trans.), xiv).

¹¹⁷ Thorndike 1913, 434.

¹¹⁸ Libanius was accused by an envious professional rival of being intimate with an astrologer ‘who controlled the stars and through them could bring help or harm to men’ (*Or.* I, 43).

¹¹⁹ Norman 1965, 333, *n.c.* lists astrological sources that agree with astrological conjunctions and blindness.

¹²⁰ Libanius claims that Festus hated and plotted against him, attempting to lay a charge of magic against him (*Or.*I, 158).

¹²¹ Cf. *Res Ges.* 16 8.1; 19.12 for similar actions in the West.

takes the first place, it is the natural thing, it belongs to our being; illness is alien, unnatural, and thus makes itself felt by its very incongruity; while the other conditions are native and we take no notice. Such being our nature we are most completely aware of ourselves when we are most completely identified with the object of our knowledge.

Enneads, 5.8.11.27-30

For philosophically minded pagans of the fourth century, purity of the soul was a matter of great importance. We shall look more closely at this idea in Chapter 4. The belief that the body, as the 'container' of the soul, needs to be kept in a state of health by those involved in the contemplative life (or in theurgic ritual), can be found in the writing of Julian. In *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods (Or. V)* Julian expounds in minute detail the types of food that are suitable for the pious human to consume in order that his soul might be pure enough to 'give itself up completely to the gods.' But it is not just the soul that benefits from the purifying benefits of a strict diet:

I think that not one of the sons of Asclepius¹²² would deny that all diseases, or at any rate very many, and those the most serious are caused by the disturbance of the breathing.¹²³ Some doctors assert that all diseases, others that the greater number and the most serious and hard to cure, are due to this. Moreover the oracles of the gods bear witness thereto. I mean by the rite of purification not the soul alone but the body as well is greatly benefited and preserved.

Or. V, 178 C-D

Julian's ascetic lifestyle is well attested by himself (*Misopogon*, 340 B) and by others. Ammianus, for instance, describes Julian's exemplary self-control in regard to diet. In peacetime the frugality of his regimen and diet 'excited the wonder of good judges'; on military campaign he was seen to be 'partaking of poor and scanty fare, which he often ate standing, like a common soldier' (25.4.2). Porphyry expounds the merits of a strict vegetarian diet - its suitability for the human digestive tract and generally for keeping the

¹²² The sons of Asclepius and his wife Epione, goddess of the soothing of pain, include Podilarius and Machaon -physicians to the Greeks during the siege of Troy (*Illiad* 2.729-733).

¹²³ The Stoics sometimes defined the soul as a 'warm breath' (Wright 1913, vol. 1, 499, n. 1).

body healthy. The pursuit of rich, heavy food, he observes, is not only detrimental to spiritual health but also bodily health (*De. Abst.* 1.46.-47).

In the event of plague

The frequent outbreaks of plague experienced in Late Antiquity reveal a different set of health problems. The outbreak of plague was a problem that assaulted and affected the whole community, particularly in urban areas,¹²⁴ and peoples' reactions to plague necessarily differed to that of individual cases of sickness. In the event of endemic disease, people felt particularly helpless and any confidence that existed in the usual systems of healing would have been considerably undermined, thus engendering a sense of frustration and desperation in the community.¹²⁵ In ancient times, the 'scapegoat' would have been used to purify the city of the pollution believed to be the cause of plague (or any large-scale disaster).¹²⁶ The existence of pathogens such as bacteria and viruses was not known of in antiquity.¹²⁷ In the late fourth century although cities were generally accepted as being unhealthy places (for the body and the mind according to ancient writers)¹²⁸ there was not yet amongst the inhabitants a comprehensive understanding of the workings of contagion (the theory of spread of disease by person-to-person contact).¹²⁹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, for instance, argues that 'since those who are ill are not benefited by contact with the healthy, so in like manner those who are healthy are not harmed by association with the sick' (*De Pauperibus Amandis* 2; 46, 485D-487 A). Medical theory had no specific procedure to deal with the rapid spread of disease in these cases.

Traditionally men had turned to oracles for guidance about dealing with plague. Oracular sites, especially those of Apollo were particularly busy in times of such terrors.¹³⁰ The plague at Athens in 430 BC which neither human skills nor divine powers could, it seems,

¹²⁴ See Morley, 196-198 for a comparison between health in the Roman city and the countryside as well as between the city of Rome and smaller cities.

¹²⁵ King 2001, 25.

¹²⁶ Bremmer, 299 ff.

¹²⁷ Although the notion of *miasma* or polluting particles of putrefying materials, changing of atmosphere and mysterious emanations from the earth, in the air had long been believed to be the cause of disease, particularly plague (Keenan 1941, 17 n. 47; King 2001, 22).

¹²⁸ Although see Morely, 193-194 who cites divergent views of the Roman city due to limited ancient sources and problems of evaluation and interpretation.

¹²⁹ Although in veterinary medicine segregation and, occasionally, slaughter were recommended for diseases that might spread from one animal to infect the whole herd (Nutton 1998, 240).

¹³⁰ Lane Fox 1986, 231-234.

ward off, left the population in despair.¹³¹ The healing cult of Asclepius was deemed, by the survivors, to be a possible source of hope and was instated in the city at this time.¹³² Similarly the series of plagues at Rome around 300 BC had brought the god Asclepius to the forefront of healing cults in the West. The government, having consulted the *Sibylline Books*, established the first sanctuary to the god there.¹³³ Lactantius had written that ‘in times of disaster, when the pestilential force of disease affecting a whole city hangs over them, all men turn to god’.¹³⁴ In the late fourth century, Libanius reiterates the importance of prayer in the case of plague which, along with famine had struck Antioch in 385:

I could not possibly recount the distress caused by plague and famine. Many people died.....All this time I spent joylessly, in prayer to the gods to grant us food and health. Health they granted, for the plague abated.

Or. I. 233

The other option for those that could afford it was simply to flee from the plague-ridden city and this was the best plan for anyone who had the means to do so.¹³⁵ The upper classes residing in Rome were already in the practice of seeking *salubritas* in their country villas, but this was not an option for many citizens. Libanius however describes how during the plague at Antioch:

....parents were induced by fear to summon home their sons as though from the dead: they obeyed, and my flock diminished, but I was glad that they found safety by leaving me.

Or. I. 233

The dilemma of whether to stay or to flee in the face of plague had different implications for Christians. Christian teaching promoted the idea that plague, as with any kind of pain and suffering, was sent as a punishment by God for human sins. The notion of suffering as

¹³¹ Thucydides, *De bello Peloponnesiaco libri octo*, 2.47 (in Temkin 1991, 19).

¹³² Longrigg, 41. See also Garnsey, 1984, 4.

¹³³ Such a threat as plague involved government action in the protection of its citizens. See Chapter one above for the importance of this kind of protection.

¹³⁴ Nutton 2004, 281.

¹³⁵ Morley, 202.

something to be not only endured but welcomed inspired early Christian writers to claim that plague, for instance, could be seen to benefit humans. Tertullian claims that ‘in very deed, pestilence, and famine, and wars, and earthquakes have to be regarded as a remedy for nations, as a means of pruning the luxuriance of the human race’.¹³⁶ Avoidance of the plague by flight could be seen as avoidance of due punishment¹³⁷ and it could also appear as abandonment of one's fellow sufferers. During a devastating plague at Carthage in 252 Cyprian could console his flock by telling them that plague is a proof of God's love; death from the plague hastens the journey of the wicked to punishment and of the just to consolation (*de mortalitate*, 9).

The Christian virtue of philanthropy - the attitude of charity, love or benevolence to those who were suffering, extended to the care of the sick during epidemic outbreaks (below, 56-59). The third century bishop Dionysius of Alexandria describes the Christian example:

In their exceeding love and affection for the brotherhood, [most Christians] were unsparing of themselves and cleaved to one another, visiting the sick without a thought as to the danger, assiduously ministering to them, treating them in Christ. So they most gladly perished along with them; being infected [filled up] with the disease from others, drawing upon themselves the sickness from their neighbours, and willingly taking over their pains. And many, when they had tended to others' disease and restored their strength, died themselves, thus transferring their death to themselves.

Eusebius (211), *Ecclesiastical History*
7.22.6-9; 2:184-87¹³⁸

According to Ammianus, members of the Roman aristocracy (who would have included both pagans and Christians) take evasive action in the event of plague:

The inhabitants [of Rome] are peculiarly subject to severe epidemics of a kind which the whole medical profession is powerless to cure, they have thought of a way of preserving their health. No one visits a friend who is sick, and the more nervous minority adopt a further efficient precaution: when they send a servant to ask how the sufferer is they do not

¹³⁶ *De anima*, 30.

¹³⁷ Nutton 1984, 8.

¹³⁸ Oulton's translation, modified in Temkin 1991, 161, n. 71.

let him return home until he has taken a bath, so frightened are they of infection at second hand.

Res Ges., 14.6.23

Mental disturbance: physiological or psychological?

Late antique attitudes to mental disturbance require some special treatment here because this type of disorder has its own peculiar set of problems. Ancient commentators were divided in their interpretation of the origins of the problem, whether it should be defined as a physical or mental state and in how it should best be approached. Philosophical and scientific debates over the relationship between body and mind, including the location of and nature of psychic function¹³⁹ and the interaction between body and soul as demonstrated by the effects of emotions on the state of the body,¹⁴⁰ further complicated the issue. Chronic psychosomatic conditions can reflect feelings of anxiety, powerlessness and social dysfunction.¹⁴¹ A state of 'nerves' can have similar symptoms to possession, and can reflect any number of distressing situations experienced by humans. Imagined disease also needs a cure.

The medical point of view, following Hippocrates' theory, held that the physical interaction between body and mind meant that supernatural cause was eliminated and physical cause, based on humoral balance provided the explanation. As such, mental disturbance as an extension of physical illness could be prevented or corrected using the same techniques as for physical illness that is, through sensible lifestyle or by medical or surgical means.¹⁴² The fourth century learned doctor Posidonius (born c. AD 309) - an expert on mental disease - having made a special study of the brain, claims that madness is not, as commonly believed, the work of daemons,¹⁴³ but of an imbalance of the humours.¹⁴⁴ Marcellus of Bordeaux in the late fourth century writes in his drug handbook of the

¹³⁹ Drabkin, 224-225.

¹⁴⁰ Keenan 1941, 23.

¹⁴¹ For references to recent research on the matter, see Grey, 12 with accompanying notes.

¹⁴² Porter, 41.

¹⁴³ Posidonius: 'Men do not become ill through the affliction of demons.....for it is not at all in the power of the demons to afflict the nature of men' (Philostorgius, 1.c, in Edelstein 1937, 221).

¹⁴⁴ Nutton 2004, 413 n. 15; Scarborough 1984, xii; Temkin 1991, 201.

effectiveness of certain cures for a wide variety of conditions both mental and physical - madness and epilepsy, shortness of breath and dizziness (*De Medicamentis* 20.3, 17.6).¹⁴⁵

The problem can also be viewed from another perspective.¹⁴⁶ There were religious connotations surrounding the origins and nature of mental disturbance. Divine vengeance or divine inspiration of the ancient Greek literary kind had always been well represented.¹⁴⁷ In ancient times the afflictions of mania or melancholia or epilepsy were believed to be caused by divine intervention or some other quasi-external entity.¹⁴⁸ Daemonic possession could offer an explanation for a broad set of human behaviours. The religious frenzy associated with prophecy (pagan, Christian or Jewish) or theurgy and daemonic possession, each difficult to discern from either mental disturbance or epilepsy, was most often assigned to supernatural agents.¹⁴⁹ In Late Antiquity Iamblichus argues (against Porphyry) that delirium (or *mania*) resulting from possession is not an affliction but rather a divinely inspired frenzy that is wholly superior to all other forms.¹⁵⁰ Augustine sees it differently and laments the ills and miseries of humans thus affected by daemons:

How wretchedly do false appearances distract men in certain diseases! With what astonishing variety of appearances are even healthy men sometimes deceived by evil spirits, who produce these delusions for the sake of perplexing the senses of their victims, if they cannot succeed in seducing them to their side!

De civ. Dei, XXII.22

Within the field of mental disturbance epilepsy held a special position in the ancient world. The nature of the illness - its sudden onset and alarming symptoms - defied rational explanation and it was known as the 'sacred disease'. Its status as 'divinely sent' meant that prescribed treatment often entailed 'purification and incantations' and soothsayers prescribed amulets against the disease. Epilepsy held connotations of shame and stigma for

¹⁴⁵ Grey, 3.

¹⁴⁶ Drabkin, 229.

¹⁴⁷ In Greek tragedy, Aeschelus' *Oresteia*, for instance. See Simon, 89 ff.

¹⁴⁸ Gill 1995, 5.

¹⁴⁹ Nutton 2004, 31.

¹⁵⁰ Clarke 2001, 75-76. This idea follows Plato's positive use of the term *mania* in *Phaedrus* 244a -245c and 265ab but *mania* was more commonly used in the negative sense to denote human dementia; Iamblichus' idiosyncratic argument is at odds with Plotinus (*Enneads* II.9.18, 21 and VI.9.7, 33; III.1.7, 19) and with Julian (*Or.* VII, 234d).

its sufferers and generated a good deal of fear because it was believed by some to be contagious.¹⁵¹ According to Hippocratic authors, however, the nature of the disease is no more divine than any others. Its cause and nature being similar to other diseases, epilepsy can be cured by medical means. Posidonius, in the fourth century, asserts that Ephialtes, (the nightmare-bringing daemon) rather than being the cause is the premonition and preface to ‘epilepsy, mania or apoplexy’; the cause is bad composition of certain fluids.¹⁵² Oribasius attributes epilepsy to ‘excess phlegm accumulating around the brain and compressing the nerves’ in combination with the humid influence of the moon. The treatment varied from inunction to administration of narcotic substances, purgatives to bloodletting, baths and medicinal hypnotherapy.¹⁵³

Although medical and philosophical ideas regarding mental illness overlapped in part, philosophers for the most part made a strong correlation between mental disturbance and moral failing¹⁵⁴ and philosophical ‘therapy’ reflects this in the idea of the philosopher as doctor of the psyche. We shall return to this subject and deal with it more thoroughly in Chapter 4. The Stoic concept of sickness of the mind being a vice places the nature of cure into the ethical realm rather than the medical and also assumes that the sufferer is capable of controlling his emotions and desires. Philosophical therapy as a way of dealing with mental illness was aimed at educating people in how to master their own emotional weaknesses through the suppression of the passions (*apatheia*), an idea which underpins Stoic philosophy of mental health.¹⁵⁵ The notion of imbalance finds a parallel in problems of the psyche as well as in the body.

2. Seeking a cure

A matter of choice

In dealing with their illnesses Late Antique people had an array of healers to consult and methods of healing to adopt. Pagans, especially those living in urban centres were free to

¹⁵¹ Economou & Lascaratos, 346.

¹⁵² Aetius (2), *Libri medicinalis* 6.12; 2.152, II. 13-14 (Temkin1991, 201).

¹⁵³ Economou & Lascaratos, 347-8.

¹⁵⁴ Nordenfelt 1997, 2.

¹⁵⁵ Nordenfelt 1997, 2. ‘For as in the body the adjustments of the various parts, of which we are made up, in their fitting relation to each other is health, so health of the soul means a condition when its judgement and beliefs are in harmony, and such health of soul is virtue’ (Cicero, *Tusculanarum Disputationum*, XII).

choose - money and availability permitting - any form of healing, in any order and multiplicity whether religious, magical, medical or philosophical. On the other hand, inherent in Christian culture was an orientation towards the kingdom of God which could divert the devout Christian from seeking health in this life.¹⁵⁶ The idea is reflected by Gregory of Nazianzus - in relation to the arduous task of the physician working for the cure of his patient's disease and thus prolonging his life - 'and all this to what purpose?' To his mind, the release from life is the 'highest and safest good to be striven after by a man who is truly healthy and intelligent' (*Oratio apologetia* 27; cols. 436B-437A).¹⁵⁷

Pagans living in the fourth century, for the most part, suffered no qualm of conscience in seeking healing of either religious or secular origin and did not hesitate to approach all avenues of healing, but rather embraced multiple approaches to their problems.¹⁵⁸ Libanius admits the use of amulets or 'charms without end' as well as 'physicians in plenty' and 'cures beyond number' in seeking a cure for his brother's blindness (*Or.* I.201). In addition, Libanius takes himself to 'the altars, to supplications and to the power of the gods.'¹⁵⁹ In another incident Libanius, suffering the dire effects of migraine, first consults a soothsayer who advises him against the bloodletting treatment he is seeking. The doctors he next consults agree with the soothsayer's advice and further admit that there are no remedies for such maladies in their art, and bid him to seek the cure elsewhere.¹⁶⁰ A good doctor of the period had to be prepared to mix treatments in response to his patients' diseases whether of natural or supernatural origin. Alexander of Tralles, albeit in a later period (sixth century), following Hippocratic tradition confesses that he feels obliged to use methods outside his usual regime in order to achieve the desired positive outcome for his patients. He recommends amulets for the treatment of colic because some patients will neither follow a strict regimen nor endure disagreeable drugs.¹⁶¹

The type of healing in late antiquity sought by most sufferers was – naturally - easy and speedy healing. Relief from symptoms was the desired outcome rather than 'getting to the

¹⁵⁶ Temkin 1991, 256.

¹⁵⁷ Temkin 1991, 141.

¹⁵⁸ King 1999, 283-4, cites modern anthropological studies that demonstrate that the sick select and combine different traditions of healing to suit the condition.

¹⁵⁹ He prays in distressed silence because of the restrictions placed on pagan worship at the time. *Or.* I, 201.

¹⁶⁰ *Or.* I.244 & 246. See above, 32. Hippocratic writings openly acknowledge the fallibility of their treatments and Galen acknowledges the difficulty of attaining medical certainty (Nutton 1991, 14-15).

¹⁶¹ See Bonner 1946, 42; Temkin 1962, 100; Temkin 1991, 233-4; Duffy, 95.

bottom of the problem' (aetiology was not of foremost importance in Late Antique healing) and time taken out from the workforce due to sickness was not likely to be compensated. There was no form of social security or insurance for loss of income due to sickness or for any long-term or permanent disability resulting from it, and at the same time medical treatment could be expensive.¹⁶² The fallout from any term of unemployment or exclusion from regular social activity could only be further hardship and suffering. We can see from Libanius' attitude to his bouts of illness the degree of anxiety he suffers regarding his employment and professional standing should he need to take leave from his teaching (*Or.* 1.139 *ff.*).

Being healthy, staying healthy¹⁶³

In the fourth century Hygieia (daughter of Asclepius) the goddess who personified good health, played an important role within the cult of Asclepius.¹⁶⁴ Her presence in the cult historically supported the importance of good health as an essential component of general well-being as a desirable state in Graeco-Roman society.¹⁶⁵ The merits of a healthy regime, including diet, along with a virtuous attitude to life had long been recognised in the ancient world and we shall see how these attitudes inform late fourth century ideas about the maintaining of good health and the prevention of sickness.¹⁶⁶ The medical writers of the Hippocratic Corpus and later, Galen, recognised the benefit of not only diet, but also of exercise, massage and bathing in connection with both prevention and cure of bodily afflictions.¹⁶⁷ Temples of Asclepius were visited not only by the sick but also by the healthy intending to stay that way.

¹⁶² In the time of Constantine, municipal physicians could charge a discretionary fee (Allan, 456). See Hands, 134 *ff.* for arguments about the existence of early Greek 'free' medicine funded by charitable foundations or the state.

¹⁶³ The introduction to *Health in Antiquity* (King 2005, 1 *ff.*) is entitled 'What is health?' It surveys the complexities of the dynamic between health and disease from ancient Greece to modern times and warns against making broad generalisations about 'health in antiquity' (8).

¹⁶⁴ King 2005, 2. A hymn to Hygieia, written in the fourth century BC, but still in use in late Antiquity states that 'without you, [Hygieia], no-one is happy' (Lee, 25).

¹⁶⁵ Wilkins, 136.

¹⁶⁶ Plato had expounded the connection between gymnastics and health for young Greek males (*Republic* iii). In the early fifth century Vegetius in *Epitome of Military Science* (3.2) writes of how the Roman army's health is controlled- that is by means of 'site, water-supply, season, medicine and exercise' (Maas, 80).

¹⁶⁷ See Wilkins, 136 for a collection of titles of treatises dealing with dietetics.

Early medical therapists put dietetics on par with or above surgery and pharmacology as a preventative measure against disease.¹⁶⁸ It was the detailed and systematic recording of the effects of specific foods on the human body and the locating of them within the theory of humours by early scientific writers that informed later medical writers such as Galen and in the fourth century, Oribasius whose works continue this tradition.¹⁶⁹ Oribasius devotes special chapters in his medical encyclopaedia to diet.¹⁷⁰ Correct and incorrect diet could determine health and disease. Type of diet was a choice to be made by individuals in the interest of maintaining health against disease.¹⁷¹ Oribasius also pays a good deal of attention to the subject of exercise and bathing including specific recommendations for the aged.

Considering some of the drastic methods of healing available in antiquity it is understandable that the notion of prevention of disease and the maintenance of good health would be appealing. Augustine offers some observations on medical procedures and the fears it might engender in patients. The surgeon, for instance, customarily operates in the patient's home, there are only limited forms of anaesthesia and there are commonly spectators present. Augustine refers frequently to the painfulness of surgery, and the patient's dread and depression at the thought of it (*De civ. Dei*, XXII.8).

As to bodily diseases, they are so numerous they cannot all be contained even in medical books. And in very many, or almost all of them, the cures and remedies are themselves tortures, so that men are delivered from a pain that destroys by a cure that pains.

De civ. Dei, XXII.22

At a time when medicines could, depending on dosage and usage, kill or cure, this is understandable.

¹⁶⁸ Nutton 2004, 125.

¹⁶⁹ Praxagoras, Mnesitheus and Diocles particularly put diet at the forefront of medical therapy (Nutton 2004, 125). See also Wilkins (139) for further instances of transmission of ancient treatises on diet.

¹⁷⁰ Lascaratos & Poulacou-Rebelacou, 6.

¹⁷¹ Temkin 1991, 47.

Healing from the gods: temple medicine

Late antique conceptions of healing were strongly influenced by religion. The activity of healing could be interpreted both through human activities and also against a backdrop of divine activity.¹⁷² The healing cult of Asclepius still thrived; the opening lines of the Hippocratic Oath, a document representing medical ethics, invoke the god and his family: 'I swear by Apollo Physician, by Asclepius, by Health, by Panacia and by all the gods and goddesses'.¹⁷³

In the fourth century, temple healing was well patronised by pagans. There was a wide range of gods including the Egyptian deities Isis and Sarapis who could (and in general there were few pagan deities or heroes who could not) be supplicated for healing. Yet it was the cult of Asclepius, remarkable for its longevity, which retained its prominence well into the sixth century. Libanius reveals that the three Greek healing deities - Apollo, Asclepius and Hygieia play an important role in his health matters. He thanks his friend Eudaemon for visiting the temple of Asclepius at Aegae on his behalf (Letter 137). It seems that during a period of incubation at the temple, Eudaemon has had a vision which he interprets to be of Hygieia. Libanius believes this vision to have been sent by Asclepius on his behalf, and he experiences some relief from his attack of gout.¹⁷⁴ Libanius also receives visions from Asclepius, one of which advises him to resume taking the medicine that seems to alleviate his ailments in time for him to deliver an oration to the emperor Valens on the latter's achievements (*Or.* I.143-144). Although Asclepius (and other healing deities, Isis for instance) could be accessed by proxy and appear in dreams away from shrines, it was far more common for people to make the pilgrimage.

The temples of Asclepius continued to operate, for the most part, as places for incubation where pagans sought healing through dreams in which the god appeared and indicated methods of cure for specific maladies. People could be accommodated overnight or during

¹⁷² May, 18.

¹⁷³ Jones (Trans.) 1968, 299. The primary duty of a doctor as outlined in the oath is to heal, not harm. There is, however, no evidence regarding the practical application of the oath in antiquity. Nutton 2004, 174; Keenan 1941, 11; Jones (Trans.) 1968, 291.

¹⁷⁴ Hygieia, goddess of health, was closely associated with Asclepius, giving the healing cult the extra depth of maintaining health. Whilst Asclepius could give cures for disease, Hygieia was more likely to be invoked to prevent disease (Compton, 324).

the day in order to perform the necessary rituals to induce dreams and have these dreams interpreted by professionals (priests or doctors) present there. The preparatory rituals could include cleansing, sacrifice (a piglet at the temple of Asclepius at Pergamum) and the burning of incense¹⁷⁵ all presided over by friendly priestly staff. The atmosphere created in these places would have been conducive to sleep and dream.

Inscriptions displayed at the temples (whether authentic personal tributes or priestly advertising) attested the success rate - but not the failure rate - of Asclepius' prescribed cures. Growing rivalry between pagans and Christians meant that the demonstration of supposedly 'miraculous' cures had become even more necessary and common-place.¹⁷⁶ The fact that these sanctuaries and their staff depended on a steady stream of clients for their survival, may have been motivation for priests to resort to the means used by magicians to 'send' dreams¹⁷⁷ and also to create testimonials attesting the marvellous cures of the resident deity.¹⁷⁸ A large number of offerings given in hope or in thanks found at sites of the temples add to the evidence of their popularity in Late Antiquity.¹⁷⁹ Clearly, people felt they could approach the divinity with a degree of hope that a cure, perhaps a miraculous one, would be forthcoming.

In a letter attributed to Julian we read that 'Asclepius, [again], does not heal mankind in the hope of repayment but everywhere fulfils his own function of beneficence to mankind' (Letter 78, 419 B).¹⁸⁰ In his capacity as healer, and particularly in his provision of free medicine for the poor, Asclepius could be seen to fill the gap left in state or community care for these people.¹⁸¹ His healing could not be bought. Asclepius had long been

¹⁷⁵ Lane Fox 1986, 71.

¹⁷⁶ But Augustine minimises the importance of publicising miracles (see below, 55 & 106, *n.* 459). Dodds (1951, 115) points out that the popularity of a shrine such as Lourdes is not diminished by seeming failures and can maintain its reputation on a very low percentage of success if the occasional one is spectacular. Only 66 cases of healing at Lourdes have made it to official 'miracle' status since 1862. A rigorous scientific process of assessment followed by the Church's sanction declares that a cure is scientifically inexplicable and therefore a sign of God's intervention (Persaud, 2002).

¹⁷⁷ Away from the temples and shrines, dream interpretation was available in the market places and at festivals from individuals who could send or induce curative dreams by the use of magical praxes or potions (Miller 1994, 106).

¹⁷⁸ King (1999, 280) discusses the possible authorship of early inscriptions at the temple of Asklepios at Epidauros.

¹⁷⁹ See MacMullen 1997, (*n.* 84 to p.57) for finds of offerings at the healing shrines in late antiquity.

¹⁸⁰ The letter to Iamblichus is part of the collection of 'Apocryphal Letters' which are thought to be either forgeries or written by someone else named Julian (Wright 1913, vol. 3, xlix-l). See below, 102.

¹⁸¹ Edelstein 1998, 178.

appreciated as a lover of mankind; he showed a remarkable tolerance to all comers including non-believers, only occasionally making the exception of those who had committed acts of physical or moral impiety towards the god (above, 31).¹⁸² At his shrines the poor gave what they could, the rich gave a lot (as evidenced by the magnificence of his temples), but the treatment was the same for all. Julian, in his writings, elevates Asclepius more and more to the role of philanthropist and saviour as well as healer.¹⁸³ This characteristic trait of philanthropy sets Asclepius apart from the older Hellenic deities (with the exception of Hermes).¹⁸⁴ It invited comparison with Christ the saviour which drew a hostile response from Christians. Although this comparison was not a new idea in the late fourth century, it was being taken to another level by pagan thinkers such as Julian.¹⁸⁵

The temple of Asclepius aside from being a centre for apparently miraculous cures in the purely religious sense represented a common ground for religion and scientific medicine. Many of the cures and medicines advanced there followed contemporary scientific and commonsense natural remedies.¹⁸⁶ The point should be made here that people's knowledge of the terms employed in the medical sciences was quite broad. The practice of healing by whatever means was a rather public affair and so likely to stimulate curiosity, interest and discussion. Armed with this knowledge, in Asclepian medicine the patient could go a long way to discovering his own treatment.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸² King (1999, p.286 and *n.* 57) discusses the absence of 'blame' on those seeking healing in Asclepian temples. Hippocratic medicine on the other hand involves taking a medical history which might reveal a flawed lifestyle.

¹⁸³ Edelstein 1998, pp. 107 and 136; Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 144 B; 153 B; *Against the Christians* 200 A. Also see Behr 1968, p 159 (151 *ff*) for a similar yet unrelated theology.

¹⁸⁴ Edelstein 1998, 113, *n.* 10.

¹⁸⁵ See below, 102, for reference to Asclepius as healer of the soul.

¹⁸⁶ Galen had given sanction to the idea of dream as both a diagnostic tool and as a source of instruction for medical cures. He recommends that physicians acknowledge patients' dreams for they can indicate imbalance of the humours (Oberhelman, 144). And Cicero had allowed that, used as a diagnostic tool, dream interpretation was of value to doctors: 'They say that from some kinds of dreams the physicians can even gather indications concerning a patient's health, as whether the internal humours of the body are excessive or deficient' (*De div.* 2.142 in Miller 1994, 46).

¹⁸⁷ Nutton 2004, 312. On Aristides' evidence, a good deal is left to the individual patient of Asclepius. The patient has prescriptive dreams which he interprets himself with help from friends, doctors or dream manuals, so in a sense he discovers his own treatment Gill 1985, 312.

The temple can also be seen as a place of respite and hope to where those suffering from the physical and emotional problems of the outside world could retreat.¹⁸⁸ The temple was designed to accommodate the needs of people who have travelled there with the same aim and in the same hopeful frame of mind. For pagans a sojourn in such an environment can only have been conducive to at least temporary easing of pain from causes real or imagined, if only by diverting their minds from the immediate suffering being experienced in the seemingly hostile outside world. The act of pilgrimage is in itself an event which contains broader implications for the pilgrim than just 'going' to the temple or shrine. Dubisch speaks of the traditional characteristics of pilgrimage which include 'the ritual nature of the journey, the power of the special site, the connection of the journey to powerful cultural myth, the social and spiritual connections established on the journey and the transformative nature of the undertaking including the transformation from illness to health'.¹⁸⁹ Travelling to any temple of healing would have involved a definite decision, effort and possibly a long and difficult journey.¹⁹⁰ The pagan orator and philosopher Themistius mentions the convenience of the 'nearness' of Asclepian temples in earlier times. In his own times however (317- c. 387) when some temples have fallen into disrepair, he writes:

If we were ill in body and required the help of the god, and he were present here in the temple and the acropolis and were offering himself to the sick, just as even of old he is said to have done, would it be necessary to go to Triccia and sail to Epidaurus on account of their ancient fame, or to move two steps and get rid of our illness?

*Or. XXVII*¹⁹¹

The fourth century saw a reduction in the number and size of temples throughout the empire. A series of edicts recorded in the *Theodosian Code* verifies imperial intolerance of a variety of pagan practices (see Chapter 1). A number of letters written by Libanius

¹⁸⁸ The *Sacred Tales* of Aristides show how the time he spent in the temple of Asclepius provided, if not always a lasting cure, a temporary 'safe haven' from the distress of his chronic afflictions' (Behr, 40).

¹⁸⁹ Dubisch, xv.

¹⁹⁰ King 1999, 289 suggests that the patient who seeks temple medicine may gain an investment of 'symbolic capital' from family and friends who make the journey possible, and through the 'network of expectation' make a cure even more likely.

¹⁹¹ Dindorf (Trans.), 402, 12-18.

concern the state of a particular site, the healing shrine of Asclepius at Aegae in Cilicia.¹⁹² This Asklepion had been ‘razed’ by Constantine (331) in an uncharacteristic act by the emperor who had, albeit grudgingly and contemptuously, affected tolerance towards pagans and their sacred places.¹⁹³ Some of the temple's materials (notably, the pillars) had been carried off by the local Christian priest and used in the building of a temple for his own people.¹⁹⁴ Although the Asklepion had been partially demolished it still continued to function, albeit, in reduced circumstances.¹⁹⁵ The effect of the removal of temples and the subsequent curtailing of religious freedoms on the morale of the community as revealed in Libanius' oration *Pro Templis* has been discussed in Chapter 1 (22). Libanius laments that ‘now the people whom their illnesses, that require the hand of Asclepius, attract to Cicilia are sent empty away because of the outrages the place has committed’ (*Or.* XXX30.39).

Despite the depletion of temples, the pagan healing cults never really came to an end, but, rather, were absorbed into the Christian cult of saints. At Seleucia, the relics of Saint Thecla were transported to the ancient oracle of Apollo Sarpedonius in the fourth century (below, 79).¹⁹⁶ But the presence of saints' relics at the incubation centres apparently did not always generate enough power to overcome the pagan deities (or daemons) present there. Events like this, whether peaceful or violent, could create a shared sacred space which although nominally Christian did not deny the existence of the gods.¹⁹⁷ It was held universally that dreams could heal and this conviction was ‘too deeply embedded in the cultural imagination for it to succumb to the vagaries of religious rivalry’.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹² *Letters* B 146-148 (Bradbury 2004, 182-186).

¹⁹³ A possible explanation: the pagan wise man Apollonius was reputed to have turned the temple into an academy; this temple or a nearby shrine bore an inscription in honour of god-like Apollonius (Lane Fox 1986, 671-2). Hierocles, a governor during Diocletian's reign had written that Apollonius had been as great a sage, as remarkable a worker of miracle and as potent an exorcist as Jesus Christ which drew a sharp response from Lactantius and from Eusebius (F.C. Conybeare, 1912 (Trans.), *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*; Smith 1978, 89-91).

¹⁹⁴ See Edelstein 1998, T. 817-820 for sources relating to the destruction and attempted restoration of the temple of Asclepius at Aegae. Julian had made an effort to restore the temple to its former state during his reign (363).

¹⁹⁵ Bradbury 2004, 182-183.

¹⁹⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus had once spent time at a monastery in the vicinity of this cultic centre; his experience here may have influenced his ideas about the value of dreams as a healing device (Miller 1994, 245).

¹⁹⁷ A. Brown 2006, 313-314.

¹⁹⁸ Miller 1994, 117. In the 5th century, the relics of the saints Cyrus and John were sent by Bishop Cyril to Menuthis (near Alexandria) in an effort to oust Isis from her shrine there. In the 480s the shrine was still

Magical protection

People of late antiquity believed that they could rely on a degree of protection from and curing of sickness, which may have resulted from either natural or supernatural sources, by means of magic. The number of extant amulets, for instance, examined in conjunction with both literary sources and magical documents indicate that a large proportion of these phylacteries were designed for the prevention or cure of various diseases.¹⁹⁹ The assumption underlying the employment of amulets is that some supernatural power resides in materials.²⁰⁰ Amulets made from a wide variety of materials - animal, vegetable or mineral- and taking various forms were designed to carry a magic spell as protection against all manner of evils including ill health. Ingredients used to make amulets are not always discernable from those found in medicines. Although amulets are fundamentally magical, their nature is closely aligned with religion; they call on the support of deities through religious expression or symbols.²⁰¹ A definition (put forward by Bonner) of an amulet as ‘any object which by its contact or its close proximity to the person who owns it, or to any possession of his, exerts power for his good, either by keeping evil from him... or by endowing him with positive advantages’ describes well the nature and function of amulets.²⁰² Aside from their general use as protection against daemons (or humans) with evil intent, amulets are also known to give description to specific maladies. In *de Medicamentis*, Marcellus of Bordeaux gives recipes recommending the use of magical *lamellae* as well as other types of amulets and incantations.²⁰³ A directive for the manufacture of a gold phylactery for eye problems reads:

On a small plaque of gold you should inscribe with a copper stylus oryo ourode [Grk]; then you must hang by a thread an amulet from the neck of the wearer who suffers from the inflammation of the eyes. This proves effective and long-lasting, if you perform and carry out the rituals while pure on a Monday.

thriving as an incubatory centre with Isis commanding supremacy at the shrine which maintained a staff of several priests and dream interpreters (Athanassiadi 1993, 125).

Popular Christian shrines throughout Egypt in fourth and fifth century Egypt included incubation, healing waters and oracle rites (Frankfurter 2000a, 474).

¹⁹⁹ Bonner 1946, 52; Kotansky, 107.

²⁰⁰ Bonner 1946, 27. This subject will be revisited in Chapter 4 in relation to Neoplatonist rationalization of the magical qualities of substances and their place in the practice of theurgy (Bonner 1946, 45).

²⁰¹ Bonner 1946, 26.

²⁰² Bonner 1946, 26.

²⁰³ Kotansky, 117.

De Medicamentis, 8.59

Although Christian leaders spoke against the use of amulets²⁰⁴ they were generally accepted within all religious groups of late antiquity. In the late fourth century, John Chrysostom admits the problem experienced by newly converted or 'semi-Christianised' folk. How are they to distinguish for example between pagan and Christian symbols inscribed on amulets in ritual?²⁰⁵ It was also a problem for church leaders putting together canons of Christian practice. Augustine, for instance, explains that:

... it is one thing to say: 'If you bruise down this herb and drink it, it will remove the pain in your stomach'; and another to say: 'If you hang this herb around your neck, it will remove the pain in your stomach'. In the former case the wholesome mixture is approved of, in the latter the superstitious charm is condemned.

Doctr. Christ. II.29, 45

In Late Antiquity prosecution of some forms of magic was rife and Ammianus complains that '... anyone who wore round his neck a charm against the quartan ague or some other complaint ... was found guilty and executed as a sorcerer ...' (19.12.14). The ambiguous attitudes of religious and secular authorities to this kind of preventative or healing practice, although no doubt a source of some concern, were ambivalent enough not to have been too much of a deterrent. Libanius as we have seen (above, 42) admits the use of amulets or 'charms without end' as well as 'physicians in plenty' and 'cures beyond number' in seeking a cure for his brother's blindness (*Or.* I.201). In a letter he writes about a plant as amulet and its effectiveness through the hands of the physicians:

I have the olive shoot²⁰⁶ from the sanctuary, but nothing more has come to me from it unless the work of the physicians must be considered the god's. Thus let it be considered and so be it. For this belief is both fair and sure.

*Epistle.*1303, 1²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ From the Council of Laodicea in 365; Canon 36 states that: 'They who are of the priesthood, or of the clergy, shall not be magicians, enchanters, mathematicians, or astrologers; nor shall they make amulets, which are chains for their own souls. And those who wear such, we command to be cast out of the Church'.

²⁰⁵ Fögen, 106.

²⁰⁶ Branches of olive, oleander, laurel oak etc were traditional sacrifices offered to Asclepius but were also supposed to have an apotropaic effect (Edelstein 1998, 182-3).

Iatros: the healer

The term 'doctor' when applied to men (and women) in the secular world of Late Antiquity covered a broad span of knowledge and practice. From the court physician and surgeon and municipal *archiatri* to itinerant free-lancers, village quacks and local folk healers, the 'doctor' (Greek *iatros*, Roman *medici*) provided, for a fee, an array of treatments.²⁰⁸ The title of doctor remained for the most part self-proclamatory and the healer's perceived success or failure would have rested on his reputation. As we have seen, the practice of medicine was quite a public affair (above, 44) and the boundary between the self-acknowledged doctor and the educated layman was a narrow one.²⁰⁹ Libanius offers some insight into his experiences of various treatments offered by his doctors. Having been struck down with an attack of vertigo followed by fierce attacks of kidney pain he relates how he experiences some of the remedies prescribed by his doctors, in a letter to another of his doctors Hygieinus at Constantinople:

Damalius advised me to drink a cure. I could not stand the increase of the ailment in the summer, and so early in autumn I drank the potion Marcellus²¹⁰ gave me - you call it the sacred draught, I think. Anyway, drink it I did, although I used to be alarmed when other people drank it; and after obtaining such assistance I passed the winter in dire trepidation, although Olympius recommended my taking it and bade me take another dose in the spring. But ... a fierce pain attacked me in the kidneys - enough to make me look for a rope to hang myself ... there came a fiercer attack which forced me to undergo a treatment which I consistently tried to postpone. Other doctors advise the use of oil for the relief of the pains, but Panolbius cut a vein, and I immediately felt better, though there is no guarantee of confidence for the future.²¹¹

Letter 5, 1-3

We can deduce from this letter some of the doubts surrounding the nature and outcome of contemporary medical care, commonly a 'hit or miss' affair. Libanius is not only reluctant

²⁰⁷ Edelstein 1998, T.503.

²⁰⁸ Horden 1982, 11.

²⁰⁹ Nutton 1985, 38.

²¹⁰ It appears that this Marcellus is not Marcellus of Bordeaux, author of *de Medicamentis* (Stannard 1999, 51, n.4) cited below, 53. See also Thorndike 1943, 584 *ff.* regarding Marcellus' identity.

²¹¹ Letter 5 to Hygieinus (Norman 1992, vol.1, 359). The doctors referred to are those in attendance on Libanius at Antioch.

to take prescribed medicines, but his letter also reveals the diverse treatments recommended by the doctors, and on Libanius' part a lack of confidence in the lasting effects of the cure. In another incident, Libanius suffering from an acute attack of gout is consoled by his doctors in a way that he considers to be 'arrant nonsense' (*Or.* I.140). The number of doctors Libanius consults is perhaps an indicator of his tendency to chronic hypochondria and neurosis and incidentally of his financial position - doctors for the most part charged considerable fees for their services.²¹² Not everyone had recourse to private medical treatment.

The state of traditional medical theory and practice in the fourth century is well represented by the writing of the physician Oribasius. His encyclopaedic collection (*Medical Collections*) written at Julian's request,²¹³ is situated within a generally accepted tradition of medical writers who preceded and followed him. It is through him that Galenic writings concerning both diagnostic and curative medicine permeated the ideas of the healers of the fourth century and beyond.²¹⁴ He forms part of the line of transmission that sustained the medical theories of Hippocrates and Galen into the seventh century and beyond, drawing the outlines of medicine as we still know them today.²¹⁵ Medical practitioners of the fourth century, believed the cause of most disease, both physical and mental, could be found in the imbalance of the bodily humours²¹⁶ brought about by internal or external forces and, for the most part, physicians treated the symptoms of disease based on the theory that it was an imbalance in these humours that was the cause of systemic dysfunction.²¹⁷ The medical methods of rebalancing the humours relied on diet or on various means of purgation. The system of humours had stood the test of time.²¹⁸ Hippocrates had claimed that good health (and temperament) can be attributed to the harmonious mingling of the

²¹² See *n.* 162, above regarding 'free' medicine in antiquity.

²¹³ See Baldwin 1975, for details of Oribasius' medical and political career and his association with Julian.

²¹⁴ Allan, 451.

²¹⁵ Temkin 1962, 98.

²¹⁶ Nutton 2004, 295.

²¹⁷ The Hippocratic corpus acknowledged the expansive range of variables that could alter the balance of humours including-seasons, the weather and the process of aging (Nutton 2004, 123).

²¹⁸ King (1999, 279) cautions that the Hippocratic corpus as it survives today 'contains treatises from a wide time span, giving a range of mutually incompatible explanations and theories, but sharing the belief that disease is due to a disturbance in the balance of the fluids composing the body'.

constituents of the body. Centuries of observation and apparently effective therapies had brought the theory into late antiquity, primarily through the work of Galen.²¹⁹

In his own time Oribasius gained considerable respect. He was a long-term associate of and physician to Julian and in 363 accompanied the emperor on his Persian campaign and treated him (unsuccessfully) after he had been injured by a spear.²²⁰ His friend Eunapius credits him with excelling in medicine and imitating [his city's] ancestral god, Asclepius, patron of the healing art of medicine.²²¹

But this tradition represents only one side of medicine. In reality, Nutton claims, 'at the bedside, the certainties of medical theory begin to dissolve'.²²² The late antique doctor shared his reputation as a healer with a good many other healing entities. Midwives, gymnastic trainers, diviners, exorcists, priests, herb cutters and druggists shared the role of healer.²²³ The drug handbook *de Medicamentis* compiled by Marcellus of Bordeaux (written 395-410)²²⁴ contains 'a selection of chants charms and more popular material put together to produce a manual of domestic medicine'.²²⁵ This collection is a valuable source for the study of Late Antique knowledge and practice of medicinal and magical healing. In this work, medicinal remedies sit beside a collection of chants, charms and magic made available for domestic medicine.²²⁶ Marcellus' recipes contain ingredients from the natural environment, predominantly the plant world but animal and mineral substances are also well represented, some of which would have been readily available but others rare and exotic and therefore expensive indicating that his clientele was from all strata of society. The incantations, magical formulas and charms (65 of them) range from simple prayers to involved ceremonies. Directions for the manufacture of amulets phylacteries and rings as beneficial in averting or curing disease are also provided.²²⁷ Directions given for the

²¹⁹ Nutton 2004, 292.

²²⁰ Lascaratos (2000) offers a theory on the high standard of surgical treatment carried out by Oribasius on Julian.

²²¹ See Eunapius (Wright 1922, 532-33) for his digression on five contemporary physicians including biographical detail of Oribasius.

²²² Nutton 1991, 15.

²²³ Nutton 1985, 40.

²²⁴ Stannard, 47.

²²⁵ Marcellus' 'fascinating farrago of drugs and folklore' is an important work in the history of pharmacy in the West (Scarborough, 1984, 224).

²²⁶ Nutton 2004, 300. See above, 50-51, for use of amulets.

²²⁷ Stannard, 49-50.

precise collection, preparation and use of all these ingredients typify the magical arts in which nothing is left to chance.²²⁸ The lines drawn between pagan medicine and magic were so flexible that it is difficult to tell from the material in the medical books of, for instance, Marcellus of Bordeaux whether he is Christian or pagan; ‘one man's magic might turn out to be another man's medicine’.²²⁹

Despite similarities in the type of healing sought by Christians and pagans, the Christian attitude differed in relation to the role of the healer. In Christian doctrine there existed a degree of tension between the idea of, on one hand, Christ as the ultimate healer and on the other, the existence of human doctors and their medicine, given to mankind by God out of his divine providence. This dogma meant that Christians, although not hostile to physicians, allowed them little credit in the healing process. The church fathers nevertheless held the God-given ‘art’ of medicine in high esteem and Gregory Nazianzus writes that ‘one who is ill should seek the ministrations of the physicians; ill health should be cured, not disparaged and made little of’.²³⁰

At the same time miracle cures formed the basis for many conversions to Christianity promoting God as the ultimate healer, working through Christ and, later, holy men (dead or alive) in response to prayers offered and penance done, which provided impetus for many conversions (or semi-conversions) to Christianity.²³¹ Although Christians believed in the reality of miraculous cures recourse to this kind of cure was unusual and often sought only after the failure of traditional means of cure.²³² Augustine de-emphasises the publicising of contemporary miracles (above, 46) (although they still happen) ‘... the miracles [of old] were published that they might produce faith, and the faith which they produced brought them into greater prominence’. These marvels belong to a canon of sacred writings to be used for instructing congregations (*De civ. Dei*, XXII.8). Belief in miracle cures was, however, not incompatible with secular medicine, neither were Christians hostile to engaging secular medicine to cure sickness. God, out of his love for mankind, had

²²⁸ Stannard, 51.

²²⁹ Stannard, 50; Nutton 1991, 18; P. Brown 1981, 113-118.

²³⁰ *Ep.* 149.165; *Carm. hist.* I.65.1-2.1

²³¹ Chadwick 1985a, 25-6. The idea that the dead are not loathsome but holy was difficult for pagans to comprehend (Murray 1983, 200).

²³² Keenan 1941, 25.

provided the art of medicine and materials from which to manufacture remedies for disease.²³³

The church fathers of the fourth century make frequent allusions to all aspects of contemporary medicine in their writings. The well known triad, Gregory of Nazianzus, St Gregory of Nyassa and his brother St Basil were all well acquainted with the current trends in medical treatments. Gregory of Nazianzus for instance studied medicine in the same *milieu* as Oribasius; they were both informed by the same Hippocratic/Galenic tradition of medicine. His close friend Basil, well versed in the 'art' of medicine was to establish the first known hospital outside the walls of Caesaria - his brother, Caesarius, also trained in medicine, was appointed court physician by, in turn, the emperors Constantius, Julian, Valens and Valentinian.²³⁴ But what Christian writers were against were the less admirable type of medical practitioners; the physician who works only for gain; the negligent practitioners and the charlatans who played on people's credulity²³⁵ and pagans would have been in agreement with this.

The idea of relying on God as the ultimate healer had limited appeal but there were those, notably strict ascetics, who chose to shun all modes of healing and put their trust in their one God's healing powers through faith and prayer. Paradoxically, healing could be viewed negatively as interfering with the course of God's punishment of sinners (above, 37-38). The idea of suffering being inflicted by God as an admonition permeates Christian thought. The same God who provides the means for humans to alleviate the suffering of sickness can also be the cause of this suffering; the suffering can for Christians be for their own spiritual good.²³⁶ Despite these beliefs, Christians as well as pagans for the most part made great effort to ameliorate the sufferings of sickness.

Who will care for the sick?

There is not a lot of evidence available concerning who were the actual carers of the sick in Late Antiquity. For the most part, this kind of care took place in the home and was

²³³ Origen, Basil, Gregory of Nyassa, John Chrysostom and Augustine are in agreement on this (Amundsen 1982, 333-4).

²³⁴ Keenan 1941, 11-12. From Nazianzus, *Or. VII, Panegyric on his Brother S. Caesarius*.

²³⁵ Gregory of Nyassa, *Contra usuarios*, 46, 437A: *de Funeribus de Placilla* 46, 885 D.

²³⁶ Amundsen 1982, 337. Pagans held similar beliefs.

performed by mostly female family members or slaves. In the case of the mentally dysfunctional, it would appear that systematic long-term care at any kind of institution was unlikely; they were in all likelihood cared for by family or neighbours or left to wander about the city or countryside fending for themselves.²³⁷ There is a reference to this from the Christian apologist, Epiphanius in the fourth century relating that; ‘there was a madman in the city who roamed the town I mean Tiberias, naked. If he dressed he would often tear his clothing apart, as such people will’.²³⁸

Care for the suffering however was at the core of Christian doctrine and duty of care of the sick was explicit in the doctrine of Christian charity.²³⁹ Healing was a crucial part of Jesus' works; the love for one's fellow human that was explicit in Christian teaching as a component of philanthropy was manifested in healing and also in caring for the sick. The model of Christian care propounded a sense of communal obligation to care for all disadvantaged folk, in the Jewish style of charity giving,²⁴⁰ particularly for the poor and the sick regardless of their status or religion. Conversion to Christianity by the wealthy resulted in their renouncing and donating their extensive wealth to the Church (in the hope of salvation). The exhortations of Gregory of Nazianzus and Basil of Caesarea for people to provide food, shelter, clothing and appropriate medicines [for lepers] were not in vain. Gregory declares that thanks to Basil's example, ‘the leaders of society vied with one another in their charitable services to these unfortunates’.²⁴¹

This wealth would be distributed amongst the poor and needy, or would fund such charitable establishments as hospices, homes for the aged and orphanages which were attached to churches.²⁴² It was these establishments that would in time evolve into an institution that offered the additional service of medical care for the sick.²⁴³ In the late fourth and early fifth centuries ‘hospices’ were founded in several centres in the eastern

²³⁷ Grey, 3 & n. 10.

²³⁸ *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, Book I (Sections 1-46) II, 10, 3, p. 127. F. Williams (trans.).

²³⁹ Nutton 2004, 289.

²⁴⁰ Nutton 2004, 288.

²⁴¹ *Or.*1XIV.10.11. (Keenan 1941, 18).

²⁴² Averil Cameron 1993, 127; Nutton 2004, 307.

²⁴³ Basil of Caesarea, St Ephraim and John Chrysostom are all credited with establishing ‘hospitals’ in the late fourth century.

part of the empire, and also in the West in lesser numbers.²⁴⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus describes the large philanthropic institution founded by Basil at Caesarea as a ‘new city’, a multipurpose institution that besides providing care for the sick and poor, also housed lepers, travellers and others.²⁴⁵ The mentally dysfunctional could also find refuge in such a place.²⁴⁶ Nazianzus describes it as ‘a storehouse of piety where disease is regarded in a religious light and sympathy is put to the test’.²⁴⁷ In institutions such as this a combination of healing activities was united within a religious framework of care, compassion and charity.²⁴⁸

The pagan model of philanthropy as it stood in the fourth century was different from the Christian. The orator Themistius alludes to the word *philanthropia* in a number of his addresses to the emperors from Constantius to Theodosius I using it to describe the greatest virtues of an emperor - the principles of love and humanity - which allow him to rule with ‘justice, mildness and clemency’.²⁴⁹ For Libanius too, *philanthropia* represents one of the greatest qualities an emperor (Julian, in this case) and his subjects can possess (*Or. III. 29*).²⁵⁰ In the spirit of demonstrating that paganism could, as a way of life, provide principles that were as good as those of Christianity, Late Antique writers begin to develop *philanthropia* as a ‘principle of conduct’.²⁵¹

We are made aware of the shift in pagan thinking on this matter through the letters of Julian. In his letter to Arsacius, the high priest of Galatia, Julian bemoans the fact that ‘the Hellenic religion does not yet prosper as I desire’. Despite the flourishing of pagan worship of the gods, he continues, ‘it is their [the Jews' and Christians'] benevolence to strangers, their care for the graves of the dead and the pretended holiness of their lives that have done most to increase atheism’ (Letter 22, 429 C). He feels that it reflects badly on pagans that Jews never need to beg, and that Christians support, not only their own poor, but pagan

²⁴⁴ Nutton 2004, 307. For a survey of privately funded hospitals in Egypt by the sixth century see Van Minnen, 161 ff.

²⁴⁵ Lepers hold a metaphoric significance for Christians in the context of redemption. Nazianzus exhorts his audience to enter into physical contact with the sick to fulfil the moral mandate of *philanthropia* that in turn may open one to receive spiritual healing (Holman, 295).

²⁴⁶ Grey, 3.

²⁴⁷ In *laudem Basilii magni*, chap. 63, cols. 577-79.

²⁴⁸ Nutton 2004, 309.

²⁴⁹ Downey 1955, 201.

²⁵⁰ Downey 1955, 204.

²⁵¹ Downey 1955, 199.

poor as well; both Jews and Christians, it would seem, are practicing the very social programs at which he is failing.²⁵² This theme of revamping the traditional Graeco-Roman model of *philanthropia* was frequent in his pastoral letters²⁵³ as is illustrated also in his letter exhorting a provincial priest to ‘above all exercise philanthropy, for from it result many other blessings, and moreover that choicest and greatest blessing of all, the good will of the gods’ (*Letter to a Priest*, 289 B).²⁵⁴ Julian's concern is that, through pagan neglect of such matters, the Christians have stepped in to fill an existent gap with their charitable relief work, and consequently won many converts.²⁵⁵ Julian insists that:

We ought then to share our money with all men, but more generously with the good, and with the helpless and poor so as to suffice for their need. And I will assert, even though it be paradoxical to say so, that it would be a pious act to share our clothes and food even with the wicked. For it is to the humanity in a man that we give, and not to his moral character.

Letter to a Priest, 290 D

This idea was novel and one that was borrowed from Christian teaching. Both Greek and Roman tradition advocated giving only to the deserving; that is the good and the worthy man whose social or intellectual standing related in some way to that of the donor.²⁵⁶ The concept of the donor feeling pity for those receiving alms, rather than considering the personal kudos or rewards involved, was one that was far removed from the classical attitude to the poor, who were deemed undeserving of such a feeling. It was in the area of charitable care for the sick that pagans had a lot to learn from Christians.

Conclusion

The overwhelming desire of humans, with few exceptions, to feel well necessitated their continuous seeking of all manner of healing - religious and secular, natural and supernatural. What emerges from this study of pagan ideas about healing is that between

²⁵² Limberis, 383. See below, 106-7, n. 468.

²⁵³ Wright 1923, vol. 3, 68, n. 2.

²⁵⁴ Cf. Gregory Nyassa, *de pauper amandis* 1; GNO 9.1, 103. ‘Mercy and good deeds are works God loves; they divinize those who practice them and press them into the likeness of goodness, that they might become the image of the Primordial Being, incomposite, which surpasses all intelligence’.

²⁵⁵ Downey 1955, 203-204.

²⁵⁶ Hands, 74-75.

the members of various schools of thought there existed, for the most part, a degree of cooperation. The conscientious physician carried out his art using a canon of medical knowledge gathered from preceding schools of thought. His knowledge and experience allowed him to offer some explanation of illness and perhaps a prognosis to his patient. He was however prepared to admit his limitations and advise his patient to look elsewhere in the areas of religion or magic for a cure when he could not assure it. The religious healing cults provided a source of healing that was administered by priests, yet was in agreement with contemporary medical theory. Christians, whose religious beliefs often put them at odds with secular ways of healing, nevertheless engaged with most aspects of contemporary methods of healing, and took the organised care of the sick and suffering to an unprecedented level.

This chapter has looked at the ways in which pagans of Late Antiquity understood sickness, both physical and mental, and how they sought to minimise the suffering that could result from it. In approaching healing the areas of religion and magic and medicine sit well together in the pagan mind. The health related hopes and fears of Libanius give an indication of this:

My fear of falling [during an attack of migraine] was recommendation enough for me to stay at home and give up my teaching, but here too one of the gods stretched out his hand over me and by the agency of a good soothsayer, he relieved my fear with hope. My fear continued to attack, but hope opposed it and tried to win the day.

Or. I.268

CHAPTER 3

EASING THE ANXIOUS MIND

Introduction

Aside from physical sufferings, humans are beset by a host of anxieties that can compromise their peace of mind. These anxieties can fill the mind with uneasiness and distress through fear of misfortune. Where can men seek ways of dealing with the sufferings that arise from their fears, whether real or imagined? How can men protect themselves from the evils of the world? This chapter investigates firstly, fourth century pagan ideas on the subject of fate and chance and how people understood these forces and the way they shape human lives. Secondly, the chapter looks at the steps people of the late fourth century might, in seeking peace of mind, take to control the way these unseen forces work in their lives.

With few exceptions, people of late antiquity believed in the powers of supernatural forces and their interest in human affairs. Men's fortunes, good or bad, it was believed, depended on the unseen.²⁵⁷ Perplexing questions perennially surround the subject of the roles that the powers of divine providence, fate and fortune and chance, in all their complexities and nomenclatures, play in the lives of men and women. These problems have clearly preoccupied humans for many centuries. The number of treatises created in antiquity carrying the title *De Fato* bear witness to the attempt of philosophers and theologians - amongst others - both pagan and Christian, to rationally work out some answers.²⁵⁸ To what degree fate controls the mapping of a man's life and how much scope he has to set his own course is the conundrum that forms the basis of this chapter.

On a practical level, people could choose whether or not to take any kind of action in an attempt to take control of the forces apparently working to shape their lives. Not everyone, of course, wants to seek information about the future. Many people of Late Antiquity were presumably content to live out their lives subjecting themselves to the elements of chance and optimistically holding out hope for a happy outcome. The strict determinism inherent

²⁵⁷ Jones 1972, 49.

²⁵⁸ See Greene, 351 *n.* 117 for sources containing lists of treatises with this title.

in divination may have deterred some from seeking foreknowledge of what mixed fortune might befall them. But even if some, particularly those people adhering to Stoic doctrine were content to ride the currents of fate with calm acceptance,²⁵⁹ others would have sought to extricate themselves from the decrees of destiny. Through utilising a wide selection of modes of divination and religious ritual, people believed they could arm themselves with foreknowledge and hope in order to relieve the anxiety arising from not knowing what the future holds, and fearing the worst. Pagans understood that traditionally, through prayer and action, they could make a contribution to how their lives unfolded and perhaps even *Fortuna* and the gods might be induced to change their ways.²⁶⁰ Should a man decide not to let fate control his life there were many options, deriving from the natural and the supernatural realms, open to him in the pursuit of peace of mind.

Pagans of late antiquity had not only the traditional concepts of the role of fate to draw on but also some more modern views put forward partly in response to Christian arguments currently being raised on the subject. Ammianus incorporates *Fortuna* in his narrative in traditional historical style. She is the executor of the will of the gods and represents ‘the way things turned out’.²⁶¹ The orator, Libanius, uses *Fortuna* primarily as a literary device in his letters and orations, but in his private writing he reveals different personal insights into how he perceives the role of fate in his own life. Sallustius’ philosophical treatise, *Concerning the Gods and the Universe*, contains tracts on providence, fate and chance mostly informed by early common-place philosophical ideas but also incorporating contemporary Neoplatonist views. Christian writers had taken up the debate on fate and a number of the pagan ideas put forward were in response to these. Augustine gave earnest thought to the problem. The Cappadocian Fathers, particularly Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389 AD), also added their voices to the fray with the Christian view of fate.

The sense of futility and helplessness that can emerge in the face of immutable destiny is an incentive for most humans to attempt to gain a glimpse of what is in store for them and to act on this information. In the ancient world many people believed that signs sent by the gods could be interpreted in a way that made knowledge of the future possible. Luck has

²⁵⁹ Epictetus had expressed it thus - ‘do not seek to have events happen as you want them to, but instead want them to happen as they do and your life will go well’ (*Handbook* 8, Oldfather (Trans.) in Perkins, 79).

²⁶⁰ Norman 1965, xx.

²⁶¹ Davies, 268-9.

observed that ‘almost anything that could be experienced or observed, anything that attracted attention, anything that could be manipulated . . . [and] had some meaning for the individual or the community’ could be utilised for this purpose.²⁶² The modes by which this knowledge was sought were equally diverse and men and women displayed a remarkable degree of inventiveness in this area.²⁶³ Davies has observed in the historical narrative of Ammianus, a shift in the emphasis on divination which, having previously played second fiddle to placating the gods, now took the forefront in religion.²⁶⁴ The discussion of this theme has links with chapter four where theurgy with its promise of escape from fate is investigated.

Of the myriad types of divination used in late antiquity the examples selected for close scrutiny are astrology and oneiromancy, although other types of divination are not excluded from the discussion. The reason for selecting these two is that, firstly, they are representative of widely practiced divination during the late fourth century and thus are well represented in the extant body of literary works (and other evidence) from this period. And further, they had both a polarizing effect on pagan and Christian thinkers (astrology) and syncretising (oneiromancy) thus animating the debate particularly in the case of astrology which, with its close ties with determinism, was a topic for intensive discussion.

1. The Forces of Fate

Human suffering

A fourth century literary work on astrology, written by the pagan Roman astrologer Firmicus Maternus (c. AD 334-337) offers a view of the lives of the ‘weary and heavy laden’ of the world and their sufferings.²⁶⁵ Although the subject of the book is astrology one of the side products of a book like this is that it gives an account of the anxieties and miseries experienced by the people of the late fourth century.²⁶⁶ In the third and fourth chapters of the book, drawing from observations of the constellations and the effects upon

²⁶² Luck 1985, 257.

²⁶³ Matthews 1989, 223.

²⁶⁴ Davies, 242

²⁶⁵ Thorndike 1913, 433.

²⁶⁶ It is noteworthy that in his later work (*err. prof. rel.*), Firmicus declines to refute astrology. This is unusual, as Cumont has observed, ‘at the end of the fourth century a polemic against paganism was almost inseparable from a refutation of astrology....’ Forbes 1970, 19.

men born under them he provides us with a view of the kinds of misfortunes that he has observed to bring about human suffering. Human misery, Firmicus Maternus tells us, is brought about by such misfortunes as slavery, captivity, toil and hardship; a low and ignoble existence, unpopularity and infamy. Loss of property, poverty and destitution are frequently mentioned as are factors such as danger, disease and death (which could mean bereavement or fear of one's own death) as big contributors to suffering. All manner of illnesses are mentioned in his treatise- frequent cases of mental disorders, physical deformities and loss of faculties (sight, hearing, speech), and assorted ailments of all bodily parts and functions.

Unseen powers

In antiquity men personified those powers which they perceived to operate in the world either determining or altering the course of human life. These personifications, Greek *Tyche* and her Roman counterpart *Fortuna* and their associates *Adrastia* (*Nemesis* or retribution) and *Themis* (divine justice and order) permeate the literatures of antiquity. Ammianus devotes more than one digression to the roles of these forces in the lives of men. He outlines *Adrastia's* vast domain and her activities:

Queen over all causation and arbiter and umpire of all events, she controls the urn from which men's lots are cast and regulates their vicissitudes of fortune, often bringing their enterprises to a different end from that which they designed and confounding their various actions by the changes which she imposes. It is she, too, who binds the vainly swelling pride of mortal men in the indissoluble chain of necessity, and casts, as she alone can, her weight into the scale by which they rise and fall; at one moment she bears down upon the stiff necks of the proud and takes away their strength, at another she raises the good out of the dust and exults them with prosperity.

Res Ges., 14.11.25

Plotinus had written of the powers of *Adrasteia* (the 'Inevitable Retribution') as a principle of order in a universe in which nothing is changed by chance - human suffering is not brought about by chance. Within the overall period of past, present and future, '...every bodily outrage has its due cause. The man once did what he now suffers' (*Enneads*, III.2.13).

Ammianus informs us of a number of examples of the capriciousness of *Fortuna* including one concerning the execution of the Caesar Gallus by Constantius:

After reaching the highest place that fortune can give [Gallus] experienced the caprice by which she makes a mockery of human life, at one moment exalting men to the sky and at the next plunging them into the depths of hell.

Res Ges., 14.11.28

The voice of Libanius helps us to gauge late fourth century thinking about the conventional role of fortune in a man's life. His autobiography (*Or. I*) reveals a life that contains the range of human experience. He endures sickness, the loss of loved ones and varying degrees of success in his professional life. *Fortuna* continuously seems to set the scene for Libanius' life; she is ever present and represents a balancing influence in his life. In his writing she can be seen to perform a complicated routine to bring about a broad range of events that make up a life. He tells us that: 'She [*Fortuna*] gives and then takes away and then again gives more than she has taken. She gets some delight, I feel, by upsetting the condition of men and refusing to allow people to stay as they are' (Letter 140). The balance tips from good to bad; *Fortuna* occasionally brings more bad than good. A series of unfortunate events in his life culminated with the earthquake at 'the loveliest of cities' Nicomedeia in August, 358 and according to Libanius,

caused me such extreme grief that my hair went white all of a sudden - trouble piled upon trouble, one thing followed another, friend after friend died, a city I loved was destroyed,²⁶⁷ my mother and her brother had passed away, and all that a man could wish to live for turned to gall for me.

Or. I.118

The good fortune of Julian's accession to the throne and his restoration of pagan ritual turns Libanius' mood around. This event restores him to a condition where he is once more reconciled to his troubles; 'I laughed and danced, joyfully wrote and delivered my orations...' he tells us (*Or.1.119*). Yet another event incident in his life, the sudden onset

²⁶⁷ Ammianus gives a full account of this tragic event (17.7, 1-8).

of blindness of his brother, brings Libanius to a state of nervous collapse which renders him unable to write a speech, the fate most dreaded by a rhetorician. For this misfortune, he declares, ‘none of my previous good fortune could ever be found to counterbalance this’ (*Or.* I.204). Libanius, it would seem, feels continuously buffeted by the powers of *Fortuna* yet he believes that sometimes misfortune can turn out to be relatively fortunate, a blessing in disguise, perhaps: ‘Good fortune can be more clearly revealed so, if there is an account of what it has overcome’ (*Or.* I.60).

For the most part, Libanius’ portrayal of *Fortuna* in his autobiography assumes her familiar characteristics set in the framework of literary tradition. Norman cautions us against adducing evidence of belief from such a piece of writing that follows the novelist’s tradition²⁶⁸ but he further suggests that Libanius’ later additions to his autobiography reveal a more private view of the role of *Fortuna* which is less hampered by literary convention.²⁶⁹ *Fortuna* is no longer alone as Libanius’ supporter – there is a reduction in the element of chance and an increase in piety. Libanius does not consider himself to be wholly within her control. When the evils of the world descend on him, he takes other measures that are open to him. He supplicates various deities and is also prepared to resort to magic and divining practices that might bring solutions to ease his suffering and that of people close to him.

Christians considered that it was necessary to dispel classical notions of fate and chance in order to assert the divine providence of God and to promote human striving for excellence.²⁷⁰ Writing from this point of view, Gregory of Nazianzus could justify the destruction of the temple dedicated to *Tyche* at Caesarea by Christians during Julian's reign in 361. According to him, this act was ‘a declaration of freedom from the tyranny of random chance and luck’ and his rejection of this perceived tyranny showed that there was ‘nothing of irrationality or fortune or chance’ in God or the actions that came from God.²⁷¹ Nazianzen takes a stand against all strands of classical thought regarding fate which in its views of random *Tyche* and determinist *Fate* (and its association with the stars) particularly

²⁶⁸ Norman 1965, xviii.

²⁶⁹ Norman 1965, xix.

²⁷⁰ Pelikan, 161.

²⁷¹ *Or.* XVIII.34, Pelikan, 160.

rivals Christian thought on specifically God and the teleology of divine providence.²⁷² But this line of discussion was not exclusive to Christians. The idea that determinism was dangerous to morality had a long history in pagan philosophy. Not only does a man whose life is completely mapped out and controlled by external forces have no motivation for moral responsibility, but any human effort and thought becomes futile. The decision to live a good or evil life is made through free will; fatalism brings a pessimistic outlook as is voiced in the old Greek saying that only in death is a man released from the powers of fate.²⁷³ In the fourth century, Sallustius puts forward, in relation to the deterministic aspect of astrology, the argument for moralistic consideration: 'Fate is the ordinance of the celestial bodies, controlling human affairs and in particular our bodily nature' he tells us. But he adds 'Fate does not compel us to sin; we cannot escape our moral responsibility' (IX).

2. Seeking peace of mind

A belief in rigid determinism for a world craving, above all, salvation (escape) from the paralysing power of fate (*Heimarmene*) was a crushing prospect for the individual.²⁷⁴ We shall investigate here the extent to which people of the late fourth century might consider that they had the potential to control the direction their lives took. Some would argue that they were completely in the power of an external fate or destiny or of the gods in a theory of determinism or fatalism. Others could argue that certain things are in our power to an extent and we may make deliberate choices in conformity with nature and reason. Outside of these two elements lies that other group of indeterminate factors which men might recognise as chance. These are the factors that affect life to a large degree yet cannot be foreseen and can make for either a 'smooth passage' or a challenge to man's endurance.²⁷⁵ How should man respond to the adverse conditions and events that he encounters?

From Sallustius' treatise we can learn a good deal about late antique pagan ideas and practices. Of particular relevance to this chapter are his views concerning the existence of

²⁷² Pelikan, 154.

²⁷³ Sophocles' *Antigone*, 1411-12. But in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (11, 5-6) Isis reveals to the hero Lucius that she has the power to prolong his life beyond the time allocated by fate in return for his assiduous piety (Sauer, 133-34; Luck 2000, 230).

²⁷⁴ Dodds 1960, 3; 1973, 131.

²⁷⁵ Greene, 8.

evils in the universe and the means the Gods have provided for man to overcome the trials of life. In chapter XII of the work, Sallustius reasons that, on account of the complete goodness of the gods, there is no positive evil force in the world. Rather, evils are caused by the absence of good, as darkness is the absence of light. Even evil spirits cannot exist, for if the Gods who are good make all things they are incapable of producing anything that is evil. But, he claims, in the case of human error, the Gods have sent a number of devices to prevent or heal these evils; arts and sciences, prayers and curses, sacrifices and initiations, laws and constitutions, judgements and punishments. In this chapter we shall investigate a selection of these ‘devices’ in order to gain insight into how late fourth century pagans might seek peace of mind.

The workings of divination

The practice of divination offers a tool by which men might glimpse the future and adjust their actions to accommodate potential misfortunes if they so desire. But divination is not merely a matter of foreknowledge; it can also provide reassurance about current anxieties. It can be seen as a way of dealing with crisis and conflict with a ‘high degree’ of rationality, an attempt to extend the realm of *ratio*, of knowledge and control beyond the barrier of the future.²⁷⁶ Justification for divination put forward by Stoics centred on the principle of cosmic sympathy and also on the theory of eternal recurrence. Stoic physical theory holds that all things in the universe are connected and held together in their interaction through a kind of ‘tension’.²⁷⁷ So knowledge of one part of the cosmos (as understood from a sign or omen) is access to the whole.²⁷⁸ The Stoic doctrine of eternal occurrence gives the gods memory of events that will recurrently take place, thus the possibility of foreseeing future events is also divinely gifted to humans.²⁷⁹ If there are gods, they must be aware of future events; they love humans and so hold good intentions

²⁷⁶ Burkert 2005, 30.

²⁷⁷ The concept was formulated by Posidonius of Apamea (c.135-50B.C.) (Luck 2000, 206). Plotinus explains the workings of magic in the cosmos as a result of ‘sympathy which amounts to a naturally occurring harmony of like elements and opposition of unlike elements (*Enneads* 4.4.40.1-9). See further, Dickie 2002, 166 *ff.* for Plotinus’ use of the Stoic theory of cosmic sympathy’ to justify divination. To illustrate the principle he uses the metaphor of the harmony derived from plucking the strings of a lyre (*Enneads* 4.4.41). Synesius (*de insomniis* 1285) refers to this ‘battle’ between parts within the universe which contributes to a harmonious unity of the whole.

²⁷⁸ Lawrence, 12.

²⁷⁹ Lawrence, 11.

for them (through divine providence). The gods, then, will naturally benefit humans by giving them signs containing potential knowledge of the future. Humans can exercise free will in choosing whether or not to act on the information received through divination. The gods cannot alter the events, but if signs are given by them then so must the proper means to interpret them. The principle of cosmic sympathy was vital to the justification of all forms of divination,²⁸⁰ and the same principle was to be applied by Iamblichus in his justification of theurgy. As we shall see in the next chapter, Iamblichus consistently emphasized the virtue in theurgy and made effort to disassociate it from ‘fraudulent practice’ and from ‘mainstream oracular tradition’.²⁸¹

Ammianus writes what could be seen as a justification for the art of divination in Book 21 of *Res Gestae*. It is presented in the context of Julian's divinatory practices, and is introduced at this point in the narrative in connection with Julian's indecision about when he should make a move against Constantius. Since Julian had been accused of practicing black arts to divine the future, Ammianus sets about considering ‘how a wise man may acquire this by no means unimportant branch of learning’ (21.1.7). He writes that the goddess who presides over the powers of divination is *Themis*, derived from the Greek *tetheimena* (‘things placed in position’).²⁸² She makes known beforehand what is ordained by the fixed decrees of fate (21.1.8). The various types of augury- the observation of bird flight or animal entrails, for instance - are amongst the means by which a ‘gracious deity loves to reveal impending events to men, either to reward their merits or out of pure affection for them’. The signs held in voices and various signs we encounter as well as natural phenomena (thunder, lightning and meteors) and more tenuously, dreams, can all offer prophetic meaning (21.1.9).

Oracles had traditionally been the authority to which pagans (individually and as communities) of all socio-economic groups had turned in times of uncertainty and anxiety for reassurance. When in distress, individuals had recourse to oracles of Apollo for instance, and usually went away from a consultation with the oracle with a renewed confidence about the future or reassurance about a current crisis. The responses handed

²⁸⁰ Luck 1985, 327.

²⁸¹ *De Myst.* III.3. Athanassiadi 1993, 123.

²⁸² Matthews 1989, 428.

down at the oracular establishments would, hopefully, offer guidance to the inquirers about what steps to take in order to best ease the troublesome situation. Athanassiadi has labelled oracles ‘the psychiatrists of the ancient world, and much more’.²⁸³ In the third century written collections of the prophecies from oracles were widely circulated.²⁸⁴ Examples from this body of works include Porphyry’s *Philosophy from Oracles* (c.300 AD), the *Chaldean Oracles* (which played an important part in the philosophy of a number of Neoplatonists in the fourth century) and the *Sybilline Oracles* which still carried importance for some pagans.²⁸⁵ Iamblichus recognising the decline in oracular establishments prefers to lay emphasis on the ubiquity of prophetic power:

The prophetic power of the Gods is not partibly comprehended by any place, or partible human body, nor by the soul which is detained in one certain species of divisible natures; but being separate and indivisible, it is wholly every where present with the natures that are capable of receiving it. It likewise externally illuminates and fills all things, pervades through all the elements, comprehends earth and air, fire and water, and leaves nothing destitute of itself, neither animals nor any of the productions of nature, but imparts from itself a certain portion of foreknowledge, to some things in a greater, and to others in a less, degree

De Myst. III.12

From the first century AD the number of functioning oracles had been declining as attested by, for instance Plutarch (*de defectu oraculorum*). And in the fourth century Julian laments the fact that the oracles have been silenced (*Contra Galilaeos*, 198c).²⁸⁶ In the intervening centuries oracular sites such as those at Claros and Delphi experienced varying degrees of interest. In religion, as Nock has commented, there are fashions as in everything else.²⁸⁷ A declamation written by Libanius reflects contemporary fourth century attitudes to the oracle of Apollo (and also to magic).²⁸⁸ The declamation argues for the reliability of oracles attested by ‘long time and much experience and common testimony’ against the

²⁸³ Athanassiadi 1992b, 45.

²⁸⁴ Athanassiadi 1992b, 51.

²⁸⁵ Many oracular responses are also recorded in Christian writings. See Lane Fox 1986, 190 *ff.*

²⁸⁶ P. Brown has associated this decline with the rise of the holy man, the Pythagorean sage (1971, 99-100) and we shall explore the related subject of ‘prophetic spirit’ further in the next chapter.

²⁸⁷ Nock 1933, 112.

²⁸⁸ *Oration* 36, (Foerster’s Teubner edition, 3.225) ‘Against the Practice of Magic’ AD 386.

evil art of magic. The declamation, Thorndike suggests, supports the ‘oft-made general assertion that the magic arts waxed as pagan religion and its superstitious observances waned’.²⁸⁹

But divination had its critics. Some of the activities associated with divination raised criticism from different sectors of the community - religious and secular, pagan and Christian. Seeking prescience of things could be interpreted as impious, even hubristic, inviting divine wrath. Commonly accepted forms of divination could easily be construed as magic and as such attracted severe penalties. In the political realm particularly, the practice of divination had the potential to lead its practitioner to prosecution as is revealed in the *Theodosian Code* and in reports from Ammianus which indicate imperial sensitivity to the use of divination.

So, not only was divination considered by many to be a nefarious pastime, it also carried an element of danger for its practitioners. To seek information about, for instance, anything regarding the emperor could be understood as an act of treason and was punishable as such. Ammianus gives an account of political measures taken against pagan divinatory practice. He describes the uprooting of the long-established and renowned oracle of Abydos Bes (in 359) along with the persecution of those involved in the cult there (19.12.3-16). The potential use of such oracles for subversive purposes, gaining information about imperial succession for instance, made them a target for intermittent purges, particularly after the time of Constantine. In the case of the oracle at Abydos such concerns were probably justified as revealed by archival evidence which confirms the political nature of oracular activity at this site.²⁹⁰

Ammianus devotes a number of chapters of *Res Gestae* to the proceedings of trials of the prosecution of magic arts and divination. Although his descriptions of the trials tend to be hyperbolic, fourth century legislation, as evidenced by entries in the *Theodosian Code*, quite clearly prohibits divination for private purposes.²⁹¹ In the 370s at Antioch, prosecutions carried out under Valens were a clear case of suspicion of divination

²⁸⁹ Thorndike 1943, 538-539.

²⁹⁰ Frankfurter 2000b, 476-477.

²⁹¹ See Bregman, 62, n.16, which traces imperial anti-pagan legislation in the fourth century. See also, Maas, 177-178.

connected with conspiracy and the subsequent need to protect the state.²⁹² The serial edicts directed against the practice demonstrate this perceived need for legislation regarding the seeking of knowledge of the future. One case in particular attracted a good deal of attention. The alleged secret enquiry took place amongst high ranking officials who by divination sought the name of the man who would succeed Valens.²⁹³ As it turned out, the erroneous interpretation of the signs pointed to a certain Theodorus instead of Theodosius. This case had widespread repercussions, not only for those directly involved, but for anyone in society, pagan or Christian, who sought knowledge of the future by divination. People accustomed to seeking divine guidance or protection in their daily lives found themselves at the mercy of informants and exposed to accusations of subversive activities.²⁹⁴ Widespread executions along with indiscriminate bouts of book-burning²⁹⁵ contributed to fear and suspicion throughout the empire at all levels of society. Such was this fear that men burnt their entire libraries out of fear that suspect volumes might be found there.²⁹⁶ The act of book-burning in itself denotes the acknowledgement by authorities of the ‘bookish’ nature of the occult arts, particularly astrology with its semi-scholarly façade.²⁹⁷

The myth of Oedipus, as interpreted by Sophocles in the tragedy *Oedipus the King*, offers a cautionary note to those consulting oracles. This myth had traced the demise of an heroic figure - a controller of fate - himself undone by fate, luck or the destiny the gods had prepared for him and those close to him.²⁹⁸ The tale of Oedipus’ undoing contains an abundance of messages one of which is the ongoing concern with the misunderstanding that can arise from the interpretation of oracular messages.²⁹⁹ The subject of interpretation had always been problematic in the acceptance of any form of divination. The open-endedness of some divine signs invited a degree of creativity on the part of the interpreter. At the conclusion of his piece on divination Ammianus adds a cautionary note on divination, appealing to the authority of Cicero who, among his other fine sayings, has this:

²⁹² MacMullen 1966, 128; Matthews, 1989 219.

²⁹³ Matthews 1989, 219.

²⁹⁴ Matthews 1989, 218

²⁹⁵ *Res Ges.* 29.1.41.

²⁹⁶ *Res Ges.* 29.2.3

²⁹⁷ MacMullen 1966, 136.

²⁹⁸ Kronman, 164.

²⁹⁹ See Dodds (1966), regarding readings of the play.

‘the gods give us signs of future events. If we go wrong about them it is not the divinity but men's interpretation that is at fault’ (21.1.12).³⁰⁰ The consequences could be fatal as we have seen in the case of Theodorus.

Both pagans and Christians seemed to have a degree of preoccupation with various methods of divination. As mentioned previously (above, 63), the variety and inventiveness of divinatory practices utilized in the ancient worlds was abundant. Luck lists a selection of these some of which are echoed in modern times.³⁰¹ There were few natural phenomena that could not provide omens indicating the future to the trained (or untrained) interpreter. At the core of these methods of divination is an assumption that they require, on the part of humans, the ability to interpret divinely sent signs using traditional and/or scientific knowledge (and a normal state of consciousness).

3. Reading the signs

Astrology

Astrology as a form of divination differed from others types in its systematic and mathematical nature, although it nevertheless shared the common principles of divination. It was this pretension to mathematical rigour that had earned astrology the title ‘queen of the divinatory sciences’ during the Hellenistic period.³⁰² Added to the scientific nature of astrology was the religious and an aura of secrecy surrounded the astrologer and his receiving of divine inspiration. Oaths, cited by Firmicus Maternus in *Mathesis*, include those exacted by Orpheus, Plato, Pythagoras and Porphyry that their *arcana* would not be betrayed to profane ears, although as Riley suggests, self-interest could have been behind this secrecy. Astrology was the livelihood of these men; the oaths were most probably taken to protect their professional secrets from the opposition and to increase their standing in the eyes of their students and of the public.³⁰³

³⁰⁰ Although as Wallace-Hadrill points out, Cicero's *de Divinatione* Book 2 is a ‘devastating attack on the intellectual basis of the practice’ (Hamilton, 457 n.1).

³⁰¹ Luck 1985, 253 ff.

³⁰² Hankinson, 293.

³⁰³ Riley, 253.

Writing in the third century, Plotinus had devoted one of his lectures to fate and within it, a section on the subject of astrology. He takes a moderate view of this mode of divination. His lecture attempts to temper the exaggerated claims of astrologers, ('we are not to be immolated to the stars') yet does not denounce the art. Although he concedes that the stars may act as a guide for human lives, and is in agreement with the Stoic principle of cosmic sympathy, he denies that the stars act as causes by themselves. The stars act merely as an indicator of things to come. He is critical of the use of astrology as a sole means of determining a person's destiny and personality as charted in horoscopes (*Enneads*, 3.1.5).

Iamblichus too is cautious about the validity of astrology, particularly the branch of horoscope casting. He argues to separate astrology (a pseudo-science) and astronomy (a god-given science) from divine prophecy. This gift according to Iamblichus can only be gained in the presence of absolute virtue. His thinking goes some way to addressing the problem of the moral component of divination which was of considerable concern to Christian thinkers.³⁰⁴ We have already seen the place of practical astrology in medical diagnosis and treatment (Chapter 2) but astrology as a divine gift also imbued its practitioner with divine knowledge, elevating him to a priestly (and prestigious) level in religious circles. A good deal of scepticism about the validity of astrology, as with all forms of divination, came from the processes of interpretation whereby the science became an art or craft which implied a degree of creativity on the part of the interpreter.

Iulius Firmicus Maternus was a pagan philosopher and writer living in a time when both learned and unlearned folk gladly guided their lives by the pseudo-science of the stars.³⁰⁵ His treatise on the subject entitled *Mathesis* (written c. 334-337) is an exposition of the religious and philosophical significance of the science of astrology. *Mathesis* fits into the type of treatises on astrology that would have been in circulation in Firmicus' time in which Greeks and Romans might seek to clarification of astrological terminology. Firmicus' work deals with the science of astrology from its Babylonian and Egyptian beginnings, bringing it into the context of contemporary Rome. There seems to be a close intermingling of ideas linking magic with religion, philosophy, medicine and astrology or astronomy all of which Firmicus views favourably (as opposed to witchcraft and

³⁰⁴ Athanassiadi 1993, 121.

³⁰⁵ Forbes 1960, 146.

poisoning), although he does not mention theurgy, the practice of which was of considerable interest to many people at the time. Even the strongest opponents of astrology had not been able to combat the fascination that this subject held for people at all levels of Roman society. Beck has coined the term ‘star-talk’ to express the idiom of the pervasive language of astronomy and astrology used in Greco-Roman culture.³⁰⁶ This term derives from the ancients’ conception of the stars as language signs, and the heavens as text (and humans as interpreters).³⁰⁷ The celestial bodies, as signs and signifiers of this language, speak through their rotations and revolutions.³⁰⁸ Such a language was anathema to Christian theologians. Augustine was one of the strongest opponents of astrology in the fourth and early fifth centuries. To him the practice of reading heavenly signs for predictive ends was diabolical.³⁰⁹ The problem for Christians lay in the idea of the stars being causes rather than mere indicators of future terrestrial events. Astrology contained two particular insults to Christianity. A future that was predetermined and could be read compromised human free will. And divine providence was undermined by the lack of trust in God’s good government (and therefore human hope) that was inherent in astrological inquiry.³¹⁰ By entering into dialogue with this ‘talk of devils’ one could end up having the kind of conversation a prudent and pious person would be well- advised to avoid.³¹¹

Oneiromancy

The practice of oneiromancy utilises the natural and universal phenomena of dreaming as a means of divining future events or ascertaining information about present events by paying attention to dreams. The distinct advantage of oneiromancy is that everyone dreams and in antiquity as now there were dream books available to provide information about how to induce dreams through diet, exercise, prayers and meditation and on how to interpret these

³⁰⁶ Beck, 179-189 discusses how the ancients treated the stars as divine and rational gods, with reference to Ptolemy (*Almagest* and *Tetrabiblos*) and Plato (*Timaeus*). Beck’s point of reference here is specifically the Mithraic mysteries.

³⁰⁷ Burkert 2005, 33.

³⁰⁸ Beck, 7-8.

³⁰⁹ *De doctrina Christiana* 2.24.37.94, R.P.H.Green, (Trans.), 1995,101. Augustine does not, however, deny the power of astronomy to make factual predictions about the future (and past) positions of the heavenly bodies, for instance the calendric determination of the date of Easter (Beck, 169). Keenan (1940, 297) points to Augustine’s familiarity with the terminology of contemporary ‘superstitions’ including astrology. He draws on his own experience with astrology in his writings (*Conf.* III.3; VII, 6).

³¹⁰ Flint 1990, 2.

³¹¹ Beck, 168.

dreams.³¹² The possession of a degree of intuition or resorting to a dream interpreter made dream divination available to all.

The phenomenon of dreaming (whilst asleep) and the subsequent interpreting of dreams as a type of natural divination can be seen as the most obvious, the most accessible and universal phenomenon for divining future events as well as for bringing meaning to what is going on in the present. By paying attention to dreams anyone could be a prophet. Synesius of Cyrene the late fourth century philosopher-bishop (c. 373-c. 414) remarks in *De insomniis*, that ‘only by banishing sleep from his kingdom could a tyrant prevent people from consulting their sacred inner oracles’.³¹³ Throughout antiquity people had accumulated a vast number of theories regarding the peculiar problems regarding the source and nature and the function of dreams. Of particular interest in these discussions was the difference between god-sent dreams and those originating in the imagination.³¹⁴ One of the earliest ideas relating to the origin of dreams can be found in Homeric poetry. In *Odyssey* (19, 560-7) Penelope tells of her thoughts on the subject of dreams. Dreams, she observes, are inexplicable, incoherent and in parts unrealisable; they lack flesh and bones, they are feeble. All dreams she tells us derive from one of two gates: one gate is made of horn the other ivory. Dreams from the gates of ivory are deceptive, whereas those from the gates of horn turn out to be true.³¹⁵ In the fourth century, Synesius declares Penelope wrong. If she had been an expert ‘she would have made all dreams pass through the gates of horn (*De insomn.* 13). In the second century the leading authority on dreams and their interpretation, Artemidorus of Daldis, in his work *Oneirocritica* proves a useful source for the aspect of dreams that most appealed to people of Late Antiquity - their predictive aspect. In the second century also, Galen had validated the usefulness of dreams in his medical work thus indicating that taking dreams seriously was not necessarily a

³¹² The two most extensive dream-texts of the second century came from Artemidorus (*Oneirocritica*) and Aulus Aristides (*Sacred Tales*), (Harris, 20). Schopenhauer and Freud both speak of Artemidorus’ dream interpretations with respect (Osley, 69).

³¹³ *De insomn.*, 8 PG 661304d (in Miller 1994, 71).

³¹⁴ Clarke 2001, 81.

³¹⁵ See Rozokoki, 4-6 for scholarship on the significance of this statement. Synesius disagrees with Homer’s Penelope. There are, according to him, no deceptive dreams, only ignorant interpreters (*De insomn.* 8. 1305).

characteristic of the poor or ignorant. Dreams as Bowersock points out had ‘immediate, practical relevance for daily life, even among the highly educated’.³¹⁶

Iamblichus writing in the late third century brings a different perspective to the theory of sleep-divination. In the section of *De Mysteriis* that deals with ‘that which is effected in the foreknowledge of future events’ (III.1), Iamblichus sets out his principals of divination. Regarding divine prophecy in sleep, he reveals what is ‘sufficient to show what it is, how it is effected, and what advantage it affords to mankind’ (III. 3). Iamblichus is a proponent of the idea that prophetic god-sent dreams are manifested during the trance like state that exists between waking and sleeping (III. 2). In his view this type of dreaming is a theurgic experience and brings numerous benefits to mankind (III.2-3, 23).³¹⁷ He speaks of the delivery of benefits of healing (especially at temples of Asclepius) of the discovery of the arts, the distribution of justice and the founding of legal establishments through this experience (III.3).

From around 100 AD, there appears to have been an increase in the importance of dream prophecy, as indicated by an increase in epigraphic evidence which does not simply correspond with epigraphic practice of the period.³¹⁸ From this time, it would seem that dream prophecy was coming to be understood as ‘an accepted practice’.³¹⁹ In the late fourth century prophecy by dreams was a widespread and common practice for both pagans and Christians. Evidence drawn from papyri, amulets and temple inscriptions as well as from the writings of historians and hagiographers suggests that oneiromancy was the commonest form of divination in late antiquity.³²⁰ The scepticism of earlier centuries regarding the veracity of dream-prophecy had apparently given way to wide acceptance of this branch of divining the future.

We have evidence of the popularity of oneiromancy from several fourth century pagan witnesses who voiced support. Synesius of Cyrene and Ammianus propound that all

³¹⁶ Bowersock 1994, 77-78.

³¹⁷ See E. Clarke 2001, 82 for the ancient tradition of theories promoting and rejecting the divine nature of dreams experienced in the ‘hypnagogic’ state.

³¹⁸ Harris 2003, 33.

³¹⁹ According to Harris, 31 ff. who traces literary evidence based on the convention that ‘dreams could be truth-telling in one way or another’.

³²⁰ See Athanassiadi 1993, 124, *n.* 111 and 127, *n.* 134 for evidence of dream oracles in antiquity.

dreams whatsoever are meaningful and that it is merely the weakness of humans that prevents them from always knowing what the meaning may be.³²¹ Synesius,³²² maintains that ‘dream divination is the only universal road to the foreknowledge of the future’ (*De insomn.*).³²³ His claim however, is tempered by his acknowledgement of the need to differentiate between the prophetic dreams that are the ‘fruits of holiness’, and the magically induced dreams that ‘use violence towards the universe’ (*De insomn.* XII.145 b).³²⁴ Synesius' ideas on the function of dreams reflect a way of looking at and giving meaning to the world. In his book on dreams he says that dreams are preludes to real events and ‘put us in the right mood’ for what is to come.³²⁵ Synesius sees the imaginings of dreams as god-sent source of knowledge - the inspiration for his treatise on dreams was, he claims, revealed in a dream.³²⁶ To those sceptics (or ‘common folk in their foolishness’) who ask: ‘If knowledge of the future is attainable, why did so - and - so not know that he would fall in battle, or another man that he would suffer this or that?’ Ammianus replies that all professionals occasionally make mistakes. It is in the interpretation of divine signs that we err (21.1.12).

Christian thinkers took an ambivalent stance on oneiromancy. Dreams held different significance for pagans and Christians. Eitrem points to the continuation of disputes amongst the ancients on this topic and also to the discomfort experienced by Christian apologists when faced with the fact that there were some Christians that believed in mantic dreams without reservation.³²⁷ Dreams in Christian scriptural tradition had a specific purpose. They contained clear and significant messages of ‘warning, correcting and disciplining’.³²⁸ Christians understood that, as stated in the Old Testament, God could reveal his will and his counsel to men in dreams - this is how God bestowed his

³²¹ Harris, 33. Synesius, *de insomn.* 12. Ammianus (21.1.11) claims that, ‘our belief in dreams would be sure and unshakeable were it not that their interpreters sometimes blunder’. A parallel can be found in the Talmudic aphorism that ‘an uninterpreted dream is like a letter unread’.

³²² Synesius, although a Christian was also a thorough-going Hellene. See Bregman (56), for Synesius’ historical importance.

³²³ In Athanassiadi 1993, 130.

³²⁴ In Athanassiadi 1993, 130. See Dickie 2002, 166 for the derivation of *de insomn.*, from Plotinus’ *Enneads*.

³²⁵ Luck 1985, 238.

³²⁶ In a covering letter sent with this treatise and two others to his teacher Hypatia, Synesius claims that *De insomniis* was written in that part of a night that remained after he had experienced a vision telling him to write the treatise (*Ep.* 154). See Dickie 2002, 166 *n.*5, for theories on the plausibility of this claim.

³²⁷ Eitrem, 182.

³²⁸ Lane Fox 1986, 392.

exceptional grace on the god-fearing. Augustine's mother, Monika, received comfort and sound counsel in this way at times of extreme spiritual need particularly whilst she grieved over her son's heresy (with the Manicheans) (*Confessions*, 3.11). Monika also believed that she could, 'through a certain feeling, which in words she could not express, discern betwixt [God's] revelations and the dreams of her own soul' (*Confessions*, 6.13).³²⁹ Christian doctrine did not allow for divination as most pagan philosophies did (particularly Stoicism); dream interpreters were banned from Christian baptism.

Nevertheless, as we have observed from the words of Synesius, this reluctance of church leaders to admit the divinatory value of dreams was not necessarily shared by all Christians. A universal belief in the prophetic functions of dreams is indicated by the longevity and tenacity of the practice and the places where incubation took place, and by the Late Antique appropriation of some of these sites by Christians for the same purpose as pagans. The notions surrounding the workings of the powers that operated in this area were so deeply ingrained in pagan culture that Christians had to address and accommodate or refute the ideas in their own writings.³³⁰

As we have seen the idea of healing as prescribed in the pagan cult of the god Asclepius lived on in Christianity as the cult of saints. It was only once this function had been assumed by the church that they went into abeyance as a pagan cult. An instance of this is in the cult of St Thecla at Seleucia (above, 49) where the saint's relics had been transported to the ancient oracle of Apollo Sarpedonius some time before the end of the fourth century.³³¹ Thecla became the patron saint of an incubatory cultic centre there. She healed by appearing in dreams to the sick who were sleeping in her church and was known to be proficient in the application of miraculous medicine.³³² In a fifth century account, *Miracles of St. Thecla*, the anonymous author describes the broad variety of dreamers in attendance

³²⁹ Eitrem, 182.

³³⁰ Chesnut, 44.

³³¹ Athanassiadi 1993, 125. Relics held a highly significant place in Christian belief and ritual. An entry in the *Theodosian Code* from Gratian, Valentinian and Theodosius seeks to suppress the profitable and illegal trade in holy relics (*Cod. Theod.* 9.17.7, AD 386).

³³² Miller 1994, 117.

at this site indicating the universal belief in dreams and their prophetic and healing function,³³³ echoing the claim of Synesius regarding the universality of dream divination.

A late fourth century account of the role of dream interpretation can be found in the writing of Libanius. A particular bout of illness experienced in his seventies prostrated Libanius and left his physicians powerless to help. Libanius had a dream which he interpreted himself to indicate that magic had been employed against him. He describes his dream in this way:

I saw two boys sacrificed, and the dead body of one was put in the temple of Zeus, behind the door. On protesting at this sacrilege, I was told that this would be the position until evening, but that, when evening came, he would be buried. This seemed to portend spells, incantations, and the hostility of sorcerers.

(Or. I.245).

There was subsequently found behind the door of his lecture hall, ‘from somewhere or other,’ the body of a chameleon strangely mutilated and twisted, evidently by human hands. Following this discovery, Libanius tells us, he returned to his usual state of health (above, 32). For Libanius, the dream and the discovery agree in a way that offers him an explanation for a problem that had seemed irresolvable thus putting his mind at ease and alleviating his suffering. The role of dreams and their interpretation in the fourth century deserved attention as a ‘technology’ for managing hopes fears and anxieties in the pagan mind.³³⁴

Conclusion

The chapter has surveyed the role of divination in alleviating the anxieties that could plague people’s minds. Firmicus Maternus outlined the spectrum of misfortunes that could generate miseries for people living in fourth century Graeco-Roman society and the fears and anxieties that people suffer as a consequence.

³³³ Athanassiadi 1993, 125. It should be noted however, that the popular cult of martyrs drew criticism from some church leaders like Athanasius of Alexandria (Frankfurter 2000a, 474).

³³⁴ Miller 1994, 13.

What we find is that divination in the fourth century still held an important place in pagans' lives. Texts on interpretation of divine signs were plentiful. The number of people, who actually believed in such signs or to what degree, is difficult to gauge, there were plenty of sceptics. But we can see that many pagans suffering from anxiety felt they could take hope from various forms of divination. Two important sources, Ammianus and Synesius, deem that in the field of oneiromancy, to take one example, all dreams whatsoever are meaningful. Despite the curtailment of many pagan activities by imperial decree and by Christian censure a wide range of divinatory practices endured in the fourth century. In fact we can discern an increase in the practice of divination in the period.

In the context of the questions being addressed in this investigation, we can see an attempt by many pagans to take control of their own destinies and escape from the 'paralysing power of fate'. This indicates that fourth century pagans were prepared to interrogate the realm of unseen forces in order to discover interpretable predictive signs through which they might alleviate their anxieties. This desire to examine god-sent signs in nature in order to 'know more' was not in the pagan mind an improper practice. For Christians however, the art of divination was closely associated with the magic arts and thus demonic forces. Augustine particularly eschewed the probing of nature's secrets which are beyond human knowledge.³³⁵

³³⁵ Thorndike 1943, 511. It is, however, because of Christian interest in the *Sibylline Oracles* that they have survived, (Burkert 2005, 30).

CHAPTER 4

PHYSICIAN OF THE SOUL

Introduction

The distinctive content of salvation in the world beyond may essentially mean freedom from the physical, psychological and social sufferings of terrestrial life. On the other hand it may be more concerned with a liberation from the senseless treadmill and transitoriness of life as such. Finally it may be focussed primarily on the inevitable imperfection of the individual, whether this be regarded more as chronic contamination, acute inclination to sin, or more spiritually, as entanglement in the murky confusions of earthly ignorance.

Weber, 149

This chapter turns to the spiritual and the mystical realms of fourth century paganism. In order to avoid suffering both in life and in death, pagans of Late Antiquity might take measures to enter into a communion with the divine that would place them beyond the reach of fate and earthly troubles.³³⁶ Philosophy and religion had traditionally involved in a complementary relationship where philosophy could be seen not to debunk religion but to reinforce religiosity by either completing or correcting religion without impacting on traditional cult.³³⁷ The philosophical thought of the period under study was strongly influenced by the works of Plotinus whose approach to Plato gave rise to what we now refer to as 'Neoplatonism'. In the late fourth century, literary works such as the hymns of Julian and also the treatise written by Sallustius,³³⁸ offer insight into contemporary religious thought which draws on the philosophical tradition that had evolved from Plotinus. The philosophical direction taken by Porphyry³³⁹ and Iamblichus particularly impacted on fourth century thinking.

³³⁶ A.H.M. Jones, 49.

³³⁷ Most, 307-308.

³³⁸ The Neoplatonist ideas outlined in Sallustius' treatise, *On the Gods and the Universe*, could 'serve for the tranquillity and protection of inner life of the pagan of average philosophical education' (Geffcken, 156).

³³⁹ According to Augustine, those Platonists who moved to Christianity rather than 'down' to theurgy and magic did so by the Porphyrian route (*Ep.* 118, in Bregman, 67).

Fourth century pagan ideas about care of the soul both in life and also in preparation for death and possible afterlife will be explored in this chapter. The chapter begins with an outline of the relationship between body and soul. The type of language used to describe the idea of the immortal soul ‘escaping’ from its mortal bonds opens an investigation of different opinions that pagan thinkers held about how both body and soul should be cared for in order to facilitate the transcendence of the soul over the world of matter. Inherent in this idea was the belief that men might in some way hope for exemption from the law of fate. In the fourth century, we can detect new trends in the manifestation of this goal. The investigation proceeds to examine the contemporary ways in which pagans might endeavour to take care of the soul and to gain hope for an afterlife that was at least bearable.

1. Body and soul

Dualism

The problem of the relationship between the soul and the body had long been disputed.³⁴⁰ The Orphic conception that man had an immortal element imprisoned in the tomb of the body remained a widespread conviction in Late Antiquity.³⁴¹ The language used in literary works associated with the body-soul dichotomy frequently portrays the notion of escape. Words such as imprisoned, enchained, entombed and trapped are used to describe the state of the soul - its goal, it would seem, is to be freed or detached from the body. The idea of dualism existed in Platonism.³⁴² To gain purification of the soul, Plato writes:

...it isn't possible for them [evils] to become established among the gods; of necessity, they haunt out mortal nature, and this region here. That's why one ought to try to escape from here to there as quickly as one can. Now the way to escape is to become as nearly as possible, like a god; and to become like a god is to become just and religious, with intelligence.

³⁴⁰ The use of the word ‘dualism’ here follows the metaphysical concept in Plato’s *Phaedo* of the struggle of the immortal soul imprisoned in the body to dwell in the realm of ‘Forms’.

³⁴¹ Nock 1933, 248.

³⁴² Armstrong (1992, 45) discusses variants of ‘two-world’ dualism in relation to ‘other-worldliness’ or degrees of hostility to, alienation from, and desire to escape from the lower cosmos.

Neoplatonic philosophers of Late Antiquity continued the tradition. Both Plotinus and Porphyry discussed the soul and its relation to, and need of emancipation from the body. Although Plotinus who evidently was ‘ashamed to be in the body’³⁴⁴ suggests the privileging of the soul over the corporeal that is characteristic of both Neoplatonic and early Christian traditions he could concede that a description of the human being should include body and soul. This is the human that ‘walks and talks, eats and sleeps, loves and hates, and is ravaged by despair and anguish as successive hopes are dashed’. And the soul is, in this case, the living vitality that can choose and deliberate and also suffer the inward discomfort of wrong choices and the awkward emotional experiences of fear, grief, desire, envy and jealousy.³⁴⁵ Above this however, Plotinus insists on a higher ‘self’ of divine origin. Porphyry claims that part of this soul retains its transcendental condition in undescended form.³⁴⁶ The degree of descent of the soul was to take a central role in later Neoplatonic debate, and the idea of a completely undescended soul is of particular importance in Iamblichus' justification of theurgy and also to his explanation for evil and suffering in the world (below, 91). Such a dualistic attitude inevitably led to a struggle with the flesh that potentially manifested in ascetic denial of the body in varying degrees.³⁴⁷ But in Late Antiquity although the body could be seen as an obstacle standing in the way of the soul's ascent, it was not perceived amongst educated pagans as an object of vilification³⁴⁸ as in some of the early Christian orders. The soul might be privileged above the body in the thoughts of some pagan philosophers, but nevertheless, if the body were to serve as a container for the soul, it needed to be kept in a state of health and purity (above 28-29 & 34-5).

It is in this relationship between body and soul that there exists a significant gap between Christian and pagan thought. The human experience of the struggle to discipline the desires of the flesh found some consolation in the idea of being able to liberate the soul from the flesh. But the pagan concept of the soul as something essentially divine and immortal and

³⁴³ J. McDowell (Trans.), 1973.

³⁴⁴ *Vita Plotinus (V. Plot)* 1.1-2, in MacKenna, 1.

³⁴⁵ Chadwick 2001, 65.

³⁴⁶ Chadwick 2001, 64-65.

³⁴⁷ Sipe, 2.

³⁴⁸ Amundsen 1996, 134.

able to gain union with the gods did not agree with Christian ideas of redemption and resurrection. Paganism stood for the deliverance of the self (albeit with the aid of sacrament and system) having within itself the means of salvation, and for the struggle for blissful immortality for those who had chosen to live a life of virtue. Plotinus' 'One' is in the reach of the philosopher because the union does not presuppose the One's spontaneous movement of love, grace or mercy nor man's consciousness of his sinful, divided self.³⁴⁹ Porphyry voices this idea to his wife Marcella (*Ad Marc.*, 8-10). She has within herself the means of salvation. His emphasis on the self-sufficiency of the soul and on endeavour as a criterion for the philosophical way of life reflects Neoplatonist objections to Christianity.³⁵⁰ Iamblichus also emphasised the individual soul as 'absolute master of its own destiny in a wholly good cosmos'.³⁵¹ The Christian notion of redemption and resurrection on the other hand concerned the whole entity, helpless in itself, relying on grace bestowed by God for salvation.³⁵² Eusebius voices this idea:

Man must respect both physical and spiritual limits; just as he cannot fly, so also he cannot by his own effort ascend to spiritual heights beyond his natural capacity (described as fortifying one's soul with philosophy). However the rule of divine providence ... allows for man to hope that 'someone may come to help him from aloft from the paths of heaven, and reveal himself to him as teacher of the salvation that is there.' Or providence allows for a divine nature to associate itself with men because providence, being good, desires to illuminate the human soul.

Cox 1983, 75³⁵³

The spiritual athlete

The metaphor of 'spiritual athlete' has its origins in Plato's *Republic* (403e-404a). In the late third century, Porphyry uses this metaphor to describe how humans should advance to the stadium to compete in the 'Olympics of the soul' having stripped off the many tunics,

³⁴⁹ P. Henry in MacKenna, 1962, lxx.

³⁵⁰ Whittaker, 158.

³⁵¹ Athanassiadi 1995, 249.

³⁵² Nock 1933, 249. But Meredith points out that there is some evidence in Plotinus of a kind of pagan grace (1976, 327- 329 n. 3). Armstrong (1967, 26)1, is reluctant to commit to the idea of 'grace' in Plotinus' mystical experience. Iamblichus relegates all of mankind to a position too weak for self-help; ascent of the soul requires divine intervention (Clarke 2001, 119).

³⁵³ *Contra Hieroclem*, (traditionally attributed to Eusebius), Chapter 6, paraphrased in Cox 1983, 75.

both exterior and interior, that they wear.³⁵⁴ In this way, men should become detached not only from doing things but more importantly from the attraction to them and from passion (*De Abst.*, I. 1.31.3-4). Platonist philosophers believed it was important to minimise distractions caused to the soul by the desires of the body. These bodily distractions are obvious; the body needs food, it suffers from illness and fills us with appetites and fears and fantasies.³⁵⁵ But the soul in its state of having temporarily fallen from the contemplating god to corporeality is still able to turn back towards god. Philosophers such as Porphyry advise that it takes hard work to purify body and soul from the contaminating effects of existence in the material world.³⁵⁶ Plato had spoken of ‘flight’ or ‘escape’ from this earthly habitat where we are troubled by pain and seduced by pleasure (above, 83).

Proclus in the fifth century would emphasise the ‘forgetfulness’ of the soul about its celestial origin. He claims that only the purified soul is able to awaken the memories it has of its divine origin, whereas cruel daemons will see to it that impure souls remain ‘suffering under the yoke of the body’.³⁵⁷ The rewards for the pure soul are great. The soul that has managed to contemplate the forms is exempt from the law of fate which rules over mankind and ties it to the world of matter. Fate has power only over the material world and the soul that has ascended leaves this behind and reaches the ‘paternal harbour’.³⁵⁸ The idea of overcoming the bonds of fate was one that many would have been drawn to.

Concupiscence of the flesh

The body is subject to the distractions resulting from passions and desires, so this body must be given some attention because it can affect or impede the soul. It can, however, be properly trained to cause the minimum of trouble while it lives, and it will eventually die and be discarded.³⁵⁹ Late Antique philosophical tracts - Porphyry's *On Abstinence from Killing Animals* for example - argue for a lifestyle that once achieved, will free the soul

³⁵⁴ The metaphor of the ‘stripping away’ of layers of clothing is prevalent in pagan philosophical literature of late antiquity. See below, 95.

³⁵⁵ Clark 2000, 15.

³⁵⁶ Clark 2000, 2.

³⁵⁷ Van den berg, 44. Iamblichus de-emphasises the threat of ‘daemons’. See above, 31, *n.*107; below 98.

³⁵⁸ Van den berg, 51.

³⁵⁹ Clark 2005, 229.

from bodily distractions.³⁶⁰ The process of this training is a difficult even painful one, yet the philosopher would follow and endure it in the same way that he would endure the often unpleasant medical treatments prescribed by physicians for the good of his body (*De Abst.*, I.56.3).³⁶¹ Porphyry cites the importance of abstinence as the way of fleeing the grip of the flesh:

For we are bound in the chains that nature has cast around us, by the belly, the throat and the other members and parts of the body, and by the use of these and the pleasant sensations that arise therefrom and the fears they occasion. But if we rise superior to their witchcraft, and avoid the snares laid by them, we lead our captive captor.

Ad Marc., 33

It was widely understood in antiquity that in order to overcome the limitations imposed by the body, a particular lifestyle involving some degree of asceticism should be adopted. The Pythagorean lifestyle served as a model for many pagans of late antiquity. Although there does not seem to have been a major Pythagorean revival during the fourth century,³⁶² Nichomachus in the West had written a Latin edition or adaptation of Philostratus' Apollonius of Tyre, whilst in the East, Porphyry had written a *Life of Pythagoras*, and Iamblichus had followed with *On the Pythagorean Life*.³⁶³ This latter work, as the title suggests, expounds the Pythagorean lifestyle, and Iamblichus (for the benefit of his students) insists on the need for physical, moral and spiritual purification, for hard intellectual work in a range of disciplines based on mathematics, and for faith of the real theological content of traditional cults, divination and supernatural happenings.³⁶⁴

Porphyry had held the opinion that not only should the body be fed, but also, proportionately, the soul: 'the food of the rational soul is that which maintains it in rationality; and that is intellect. So it should be fed on intellect, and we should strive to fatten it on that, not to fatten our flesh with meat' (*De Abst.*, IV.20.11). Porphyry's version of asceticism is ostensibly harsh. He writes to his wife that 'often men cast off certain parts

³⁶⁰ Clark 2005, 224.

³⁶¹ Ancient medicine provided philosophy with analogies to apply to body and soul, training of the body and discipline of the soul and to the consideration of medicine as a counterpart of ethics (Edelstein 1967, 360).

³⁶² See Fowden 1977, 380 re Neopythagoreanism.

³⁶³ See G. Clark, 1989, xix (esp. *n.* 11) for the tradition followed by Iamblichus.

³⁶⁴ Clark 1989, xiv.

of the body; be thou ready for the soul's safety to cast away the whole body. Hesitate not to die for that whose sake thou art willing to live (*Ad. Marc.* 34), yet he is also aware of the necessity to keep the body healthy. Even the philosopher needs to keep his body fit enough for sustained self-discipline and contemplation (*De Abst.*, I.53.2-4). Porphyry's arguments in this treatise are concerned with a number of issues, philosophical and religious. One problem is animal sacrifice and this issue was to form an ongoing debate, not only as a point of some discrepancy between pagans but also as a significant problem for Christians. Porphyry maintains that maleficent daemons are attracted to the smoke of burning sacrifice (*De Abst.*, II.41.3-5; 2II.42.1-3).³⁶⁵ He is also concerned with the harm done to animals' souls in the violence of killing them (II.13.1)³⁶⁶ and further, the suppression of appetite for meat is an opportunity to control the desires of the body as part of the ascetic life. In *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*, (*Or.* V, written 362), Julian describes in some detail what types of food are acceptable or not - and why - for humans to nourish their bodies, as ordained by god. (*Or.* V.178 C-D; above, 28-29). At the 'season of the sacred ceremonies' in particular,³⁶⁷ these ordinances should be observed because 'it is by all means more effective for the salvation of the soul itself that one should pay greater heed to its safety than to the safety of the body' (*Or.* V.178). At other times, however, despite what seems like a very exclusive list of suitable foods, common-sense prevails and Julian writes, 'we are to use first what our physical powers allow; secondly what is at hand in abundance; thirdly we are to exercise our own wills' (*Or.* V.177-78).

The problem of sexual abstinence also came under considerable scrutiny in the fourth century. Porphyry had advocated abstinence from sexual activity for the purpose of nurturing one's spiritual side. He puts forward the idea that a life in which one's sexual impulses are controlled is best - celibacy above marriage, and within marriage, sexual relations only for procreative purposes (*Ad Marc.*)³⁶⁸ Early medical opinion concurred with the practice of sexual abstinence. Galen had, in his treatise *On Semen* pointed out the debilitating effect on men of indulging in too much sex and added that 'people have, before

³⁶⁵ This concern however was dismissed by Iamblichus (*De. Myst.* III.31).

³⁶⁶ This idea was current in debates about transmigration of the soul after death. See Sallustius *On the gods and the universe* 20.

³⁶⁷ Previously, at 173 A-D, Julian has explained the traditionally appointed seasons for the rites of the Eleusinian Mysteries.

³⁶⁸ Sipe, 13.

now, died from too much pleasure' (1.16.31). Late Antique medical commentators, most of whom followed the Galenic tradition of medical theory, in general had no need to deny the philosophic claim that the spiritual athlete (male or female) is in good health.³⁶⁹ Oribasius in *Medical Collections* suggests that male celibacy combined with sensible exercise and diet should not be detrimental to health (6.37, CMG VI.1.1, 187-8).

It was on the subject of emphasis on sexual austerity that pagan and Christian thought diverged significantly. Christians took the notion of abstinence to a far higher level than pagans. Asceticism had been a feature of early Christianity beginning in the late second to early third centuries. In the fourth century, the decrease in Christian martyrdom due to the now licit status of Christianity meant that ascetics became the new spiritual heroes in the minds of some Christians.³⁷⁰ St. Antony of Egypt was a fine example of the powers of the Christian ascetic to resist the urges of the flesh and fight off daemons - he provided inspiration and a model for Christian ascetics.³⁷¹ The New Testament stressed 'mortification of the flesh' and 'denial of self' and the fourth century philosophical climate to some extent ratified this ideal. There were some who took these ideals to include not only extreme mortification but also denunciation of the flesh as inherently evil. This attitude stemmed from the notion of the unity of body and soul. Augustine speculated at length on what he considered the strongest manifestation of *concupiscentia* – sexual desire and the severe control of all the senses that were required to control it.³⁷² Yet he also spoke for moderation and restraint in matters of asceticism. He finds in the idea that 'no man hates his own flesh' expression that the purpose of mortification is to 'extinguish desire, not to damage physical health which is very wrong'.³⁷³

³⁶⁹ Clark 2005, 227.

³⁷⁰ Amundsen 1996, 83.

³⁷¹ Attributed to Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria from 328, this work became the 'key text in the promulgation of the ascetic lifestyle' for Christians in the East and the West (Averil Cameron 1993, 23).

³⁷² G. Clark 1996, 217.

³⁷³ Chadwick 1985b, 15.

2. The spiritual life: many paths to the great mystery

Philosophical contemplation and theurgy

In the fourth century a number of leading Platonists had shifted away from the constraints of rational contemplation and were engaged in the more direct means of access to divine knowledge called theurgy, that is, active rather than theoretical engagement with the divine.³⁷⁴ It was Iamblichus who assigned a new role to theurgy. In the early years of the fourth century, the central point of reference for the ritual practice of theurgy can be found in Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis*. As the head of the Platonic school in Syria he is best known for adding Egyptian and Chaldean religious rites to the philosophical curriculum of his school.³⁷⁵ When Iamblichus revived and commented on the second century revelatory collection of oracles known as the *Chaldean Oracles*, by turning them into a theological authority, he offered a new way of reading Platonic texts to Late Antique Neoplatonists.³⁷⁶ The *Chaldean Oracles* contained valuable information for theurgists. Not only did they provide 'precious knowledge of the divine world, they also revealed the benefit of theurgy in salvation of the soul.'³⁷⁷ They teach how the divine world is structured, which god to contact, how to do it and what use to put this contact to. Thus a 'secondary' role of the theurgist could involve using his skills in 'white magic' for the benefit of the community by rainmaking to break a drought or the prevention of earthquakes and healings.³⁷⁸ For Iamblichus and like-minded hieratic theurgists,³⁷⁹ theurgy lay not outside the circumference of Platonism, but rather 'extended the boundaries of the Platonic world'.³⁸⁰

Previously Porphyry had acknowledged the practice of theurgy as part of the preliminary process of 'cleansing' involved in the soul's approach to the divine (*De Abst.*, II.45). What transpired from Iamblichus' work on the practice of communing with the divine through the practice of theurgy was a way of providing the human person with a 'bridge to mystical union with the absolute which remains beyond the grasp of human intellect'. By

³⁷⁴ Smith 1990, 143.

³⁷⁵ Shaw 1985, 1-2.

³⁷⁶ P. Hadot 1986, 254.

³⁷⁷ Van den Berg, 67.

³⁷⁸ Van den Berg, 69.

³⁷⁹ Iamblichus, Julian and later Proclus considered religion and religious practice to be basic and essential and put the 'hieratic' art before philosophy (Bregman, 139).

³⁸⁰ Shaw 1985, 12.

acknowledging the limitations of contemplation alone, Neoplatonists like Iamblichus concede to ritual the power to impart theurgic union which could provide this bridge.³⁸¹ By promoting such a practice, Iamblichus was going against the claims of his forbearers that ascent to the divine can be brought about only by contemplation and that external rites were unimportant. If as Augustine claims, Porphyry felt that ultimately the universal path to liberation³⁸² of the soul had escaped him (*De Civ.Dei*, X.32) Iamblichus was convinced that he had found it.³⁸³ In Iamblichus' opinion denial of the efficacy of ritual denied accessibility to the divine and hence any true belief and worship of the gods. This doctrine of Porphyry spells the ruin of all holy ritual and all communion between gods and men achieved by rites, by placing the physical presence of superior beings outside this earth. By rejecting the philosophical opinions of his master Porphyry Iamblichus voiced what most pagans intuitively believed:

....it exterminates from the earth the presence of the more excellent genera. For it says nothing else than that divine dwell remote from earthly natures, and that this our place of abode is deserted by them

De Myst. I.8³⁸⁴

The central tenet (above, 84) to Iamblichus' justification of theurgy is that no part of the soul, in becoming incarnate, remains undescended therefore it has no knowledge or means to re-ascend therefore needs divine assistance through theurgic rites.³⁸⁵ The theurgic rites based on this assumption, allow souls in their (entirely) embodied descent and submission to fate to be liberated from the constraints of matter and fate.³⁸⁶ This involved ritual use of material objects - stones, herbs and gems for instance (or in the case of Christians, wine, bread, water, ointments and incense) and came from a belief that God's power somehow

³⁸¹ Iamblichus describes theurgic ritual as 'the perfect efficacy of ineffable works, which are divinely performed in a way surpassing all intelligence, and the power of inexplicable symbols, which are known only to the gods (*de Myst.*, II, 11). Shaw points to the similarity between Christian sacramentalism and theurgy and the possibility of pagan competition with Christian sacramental cult and also the offering to the common man of a divinely revealed cult complete with sacred text in the form of *Chaldean Oracles* (1985, 11).

³⁸² Dodds prefers 'discovery' of the divine self rather than the dualistic, more Gnostic 'liberation' (1960, 7).

³⁸³ Fowden 1986, 132.

³⁸⁴ Harl, 3.

³⁸⁵ Shaw 1985, 13.

³⁸⁶ Shaw 1985, 16.

imbues these substances with salvic power.³⁸⁷ The symbols perform the work (*De Myst.* 96.13-97).³⁸⁸ For those pagans less inclined to intellectual effort and more inclined to the familiarity of ritual, theurgy would have held strong appeal. Many pagans of the fourth century would have welcomed continuity of traditional ritual in their communion with the divine.

Julian endorsed ritualistic theurgy without hesitation. Eunapius is a witness to the philosophical scene of the fourth century in which adherents of Neoplatonic philosophy took different stances on the practice of theurgy. Julian deliberately sought out the current adept of the practice, Maximus against the advice of his more conservative tutor, Eusebius of Carian Myndus. Eusebius says of Maximus' preferred kind of theurgic performance that these 'tricks that deceive and bewitch the senses are the deeds of wonderworkers who are mad and led astray into the exercise of material powers'.³⁸⁹ This was the kind of Iamblichan Neoplatonism that appealed to Julian who would pray to Cybele to make him perfect in theurgy (*Or.* V.180 B).

In *De Mysteriis*, Iamblichus strongly defends theurgy from Porphyry's suggestion that it is an attempt to coerce the gods.³⁹⁰ In his view, theurgy is the way of the wholly virtuous and he strives to dissociate the practice from fraudulent practices and particularly oracular establishments which he perceives to be on the way to extinction.³⁹¹ Theurgy brings the gods closer to humans; it is not an actual connection, but a route to higher spirituality.

Neither do the invocations which implore the Gods to incline to us, conjoin the priests to them through passion; but procure for them the communion of the indissoluble connexion, through the friendship which binds all things together. Hence, it does not, as the name seems to imply, incline the intellect of the Gods to men: but, according to the decision of truth, renders the will of man adapted to the participation of the Gods, elevates it to them, and coharmonizes the former with the latter, through the most appropriate persuasion.

De.Myst. I.12

³⁸⁷ Moore, 2.

³⁸⁸ Shaw 1985, 10.

³⁸⁹ Penella 1990, 66.

³⁹⁰ See Struck 2001, 25-38. For scholarship on the debate surrounding a 'higher' (theoretic) and 'lower' (practical) theurgy see Shaw 1985, 2 ff.

³⁹¹ Athanassiadi 1993, 123.

In modern times, critical of the nature of Iamblichan theurgy, Dodds has written that the 'insistence on the magical value of outward ritual is confined to the degenerate phase of Neoplatonism' (represented for us by Iamblichus' *de Mysteriis*).³⁹² Whilst giving full credit to the delicately balanced system of Neoplatonic doctrine of Plotinus, Dodds observes that 'in the fourth century the school seems to have been in danger of lapsing into ritualism and occultism'.³⁹³ In the fourth century, it was Augustine who criticised pagan naming of the practice as 'that which they call either by the more despicable name of goetic magic or by the more honourable one of theurgy (*De civ. Dei*, X.9).

The mystery religions: mystical union in this life

A sense of secrecy is implicit within the term 'mystical experience'. In antiquity the expression could refer to either the secrecy to be observed by initiates of the mystery religions regarding what they had seen or, more generally, regarding secrets available only to initiates such as the allegorical meaning of a myth. The number and variety of such cults was extensive. As Gordon has pointed out, 'the continuing attempt to impose a common form upon the bizarre variety of these cults gains unity at the expense of truth'.³⁹⁴ Any commonality that did exist between these cults lay in their set of rituals which provided a purificatory initiation ceremony at which the devotee was granted 'symbolic knowledge of ritual objects, utterances and actions'.³⁹⁵

In the fourth century there was a shift in the meaning attached to 'mysteries'. In Neoplatonic usage, philosophy could be seen as a mystery in itself. 'Mystery' could designate an idealised form of spiritual knowledge for those who understood the philosophic meaning of a cult's symbolism.³⁹⁶ The word *mystikos* could also be used by Neoplatonists to designate the secret visions an initiate or philosopher experienced on the arrival at the 'summit of his interior ascent'.³⁹⁷ Philosophy can involve mystery and mystery also surrounds matters of theurgical ascent. Iamblichus, in his theoretical

³⁹² Dodds 1923, 15.

³⁹³ Dodds 1923, 20; Shaw lists recent scholarship on Iamblichus and theurgy that has yielded greater insight into later Neoplatonism and determined Dodds' evaluation wrong (1985, 2-3 and *nm.* 20- 21).

³⁹⁴ Gordon 1972, 113, *n.* 9.

³⁹⁵ Smith 1995, 117.

³⁹⁶ Smith 1995, 120.

³⁹⁷ P. Hadot 1986, 238.

justification of theurgy, had been able to use the terms of the mysteries to assimilate them to theurgy. Synesius of Cyrene in a series of letters to Herculian (c. 397) calls the Alexandrian philosopher, Hypatia, the hierophant of philosophy, and philosophy itself a mystery suited only for pure initiates (*Ep.* 137).³⁹⁸ He suggests that the adept must guard the sacred mysteries of philosophy with the same care as an initiate into the mystery cult.³⁹⁹ The idea held by philosophers that theirs is the true mystery religion implies that if there is immortality, something like heaven and hell or salvation and damnation, it is the philosopher who is assured of salvation and heaven.⁴⁰⁰

Julian, who was familiar with and influenced by Iamblichus' writings finds philosophic lessons in the mysteries.⁴⁰¹ He is familiar with the concept of using myth as a tool for discovering divine truths. Julian argues that the only proper use for myths is by 'ethical philosophers and writers on theology' as a means of religious teaching, for the role of myth is to teach children (to soothe them and ease their sufferings) and those who are unable to envisage the truth without such assistance (*Or.* VII.206 D). Julian cites Iamblichus in explaining the importance of certain myths in connection with initiation into the mysteries. The riddles of myth, through the guidance of the gods, initiate or perfect our intelligence or 'that small particle of the One and the Good' (*Or.* VII.217 B-D). Julian for example interprets the myth of the restoration of Attis to Cybele as symbolising the escape of our souls from the world of generation - 'the end and aim of the rite of purification is the ascent of our souls' (*Or.* V.175 B).

Sallustius provides a lengthy exposition on the vexed question concerning the incongruity of myths and their concealment of truth. In Neoplatonic thought, myth can be tamed by allegory and every rite can yield a secret meaning.⁴⁰² Echoing Julian's words Sallustius writes that:

³⁹⁸Bregman, 70.

³⁹⁹Bregman, 74.

⁴⁰⁰Merlan, 164.

⁴⁰¹ Found particularly in the hymn *To the Mother of the Gods*. Smith suggests that in the doctrine of theurgic mysteries, Julian might 'ponder on the universe and the place of the soul within it' (1995, 163).

⁴⁰² Edwards 2004, 207.

Each kind of myth has its special appropriateness; theological myths suit philosophers, physical and psychical myths poets, mixed myths mysteries, the function of which is to give us union with the universe and with the gods.

Conc. the Gods, IV

In Neoplatonic thought, the Odysseus myth for example, is symbolic of the journey of the human soul through the flux of time and space to the intelligible world. Plotinus calls on the figure of Odysseus and his journey to describe the inner journey - the looking within which is our return to our true selves ('the birthright of all, which few turn to use'):

'Let us flee to the beloved fatherland': this is the soundest counsel. But what is this flight? How are we to gain the open sea? For Odysseus is surely a parable to us when he commands the flight from the sorceries of Circe or Calypso – not content to linger for all the pleasure offered to his eyes and all the delights of sense filling his days.⁴⁰³

Enneads, 1.6, 8

A series of mosaics at Apamea in Syria have been related to philosophical representation of myth and according to archaeologists can be seen to parallel the literary works of Plotinus Porphyry and Proclus. Images of Odysseus returning to Penelope as a philosophical allegory represent Odysseus' achievement of philosophic calm after overcoming the physical and mental trials of his earthly existence - or the return of the soul to its true home. A contemporary mosaic (at Nea Paphos in Cyprus, c. 350) represents Cassiopeia having thrown off her mantle being rewarded rather than punished for her boasting behaviour and the Baltys have suggested that this parallels Odysseus' homecoming - the soul freed from material fetters and enticements seeks return to its heavenly home.⁴⁰⁴

As Merlan has pointed out though not everyone's intellectual horizon included philosophy as the true religion, not everyone could be initiated into the mysteries of philosophy.⁴⁰⁵ In the fifth century Proclus was to pray that the wicked masses that have been completely

⁴⁰³ The theme is found in Plotinus *Enneads* 1.6, 8; Porphyry, *de Antro*, 34-35. See further, Cox 1983, 120-121; Penella 1990, 148; Van den berg (on Proclus), 51 ff, 185 ff.

⁴⁰⁴ Liebeschuetz 2003, 226-229.

⁴⁰⁵ Merlan, 164-165.

absorbed by the material world may not drag him from the small divine path of philosophy.⁴⁰⁶ In this case the mystery religions (both private and public) held a strong attraction for the non-philosophical members of society.⁴⁰⁷ These foreign cults had been brought by their various peoples emigrating into the western part of the empire principally from Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt and Persia.⁴⁰⁸ It was the endorsement of mystery cults by Julian and also by the likes of the Roman senator Praetextatus and his wife Paulina - who according to their funerary inscriptions, were both inductees and priests of a variety of mystery cults - that reflects their popularity in the late fourth century.⁴⁰⁹ Julian was personally inducted into a number of mystery cults. Libanius described him as ‘the man who had communicated with the *daimones* during innumerable ceremonies’ (*Or.* XXIV. 36) and Eunapius also bears witness to Julian's mystical experiences; ‘he came in contact with the bodiless while still himself inhabiting a body’ (*Hist.*, fr. 23). Under the guidance of the theurgist Maximus, Julian was initiated into the Neoplatonic Mysteries in 351. Although scholars have debated Julian's involvement with Mithraism, it is generally accepted now that he was an initiate of this cult.⁴¹⁰ He evidently built his own Mithraeum at the Imperial palace in Constantinople as proof of his devotion to the cult of Helios-Mithra where he not only progressed through the stages of Mithraic initiation but also initiated a close friend, Himerius.⁴¹¹ He was initiated into the Mysteries of the Magna Mater⁴¹² and the Eleusinian Mysteries,⁴¹³ encouraged in the latter also by Maximus (whose charisma is acclaimed by Eunapius)⁴¹⁴ and the like-minded Chrysanthius. Libanius offers further evidence of the popularity of the mysteries at this time. During his travels through Greece, he journeys to Sparta for the ‘flagellations’ that form part of the festival of Artemis Orthia and to Argos to be ‘initiated in the local mysteries’ (*Or.* I.23, n. 23).

⁴⁰⁶ Van den Berg, 43.

⁴⁰⁷ See Merlan 1963, 167, n. 20, for evidence of children being initiated into mystery religions. Evidence of seating arrangements at some centres (for example Eleusis) indicates that here was accommodation for hundreds of people (Smith 1995, 118).

⁴⁰⁸ Dudden, 245.

⁴⁰⁹ In the reigns of Theodosius and his sons cult statues were dedicated in a Mithraeum at Sidon (Fowden 1978, 62 & n. 7). The full inscriptions for Praetextatus' funeral monument are cited in Croke and Harries 1982, 106-108.

⁴¹⁰ See Smith 1995, 124 *ff.*

⁴¹¹ See Athanassiadi 1977, 362.

⁴¹² Athanassiadi 1992a, 146.

⁴¹³ *Lives of the Philosophers*, 475.

⁴¹⁴ *Lives of the Philosophers*, 473.

The implied end and means to the experience of spiritual rebirth in the mystery cults could be understood in different ways in different cults. Deliverance might be ‘individual or cosmic, from bodily ills or from the body itself; it might, or might not, imply immortality; it might, or might not, imply an initiate's self-identification with a god in his passions, or triumphs, or death’.⁴¹⁵ However initiation might be understood, it had the advantage of being repeatable. There seems to have been no limit to the number of initiations a person could undertake, unlike the single ritual of Christian baptism.

Facing death in life

Pagans of late antiquity suffered from those fears about death and about the possibility of punishment of some kind in the afterlife that have been common to mankind throughout history. Artemidorus of Daldis describes in his work *Oneirocritica* the perennial and universal fears from which humans suffer.⁴¹⁶ Amongst these is the fear of death (particularly for the elderly or infirm), and late fourth century pagans were no exception to this. Philosophical schools of thought like Epicureanism and Stoicism might propound theories about the cultivation of varying degrees of detachment from worldly matters as a way of avoiding anxiety surrounding death. Or people might like Julian, pray for a ‘good’ death. He ends *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* with a prayer that the close of his life might be painless (and glorious) in the good hope that it is to the gods that he might journey (*Or.* V.180).

The worrying notion that punishment for wrongdoing can occur after death is addressed by Sallustius. In pondering the problem of when and how punishment for wrong-doing occurs, Sallustius addresses the question of why wrong-doers often seem to prosper. Even if the vicious may appear to be getting off lightly whilst alive, punishment can still occur after death because immediate punishment, he tells us, would make men act righteously from fear alone, rather than pursue a virtuous life (IX). That punishment for offences does not follow directly on their commission, he tells us, is not surprising:

In a measure the soul punishes itself: moreover it is immortal and must not pay the full penalty in a short time. Further, it is necessary that there should be human virtue, and

⁴¹⁵ Smith 1995, 118.

⁴¹⁶ Pack 282-83.

immediate punishment would make men act righteously from fear alone. Souls are chastised on leaving the body; while bearing their punishment they have with them the unreasonable element, in whose company they sinned; hence arise the spectral forms seen on tombs, especially of malefactors.⁴¹⁷

Conc. the Gods, XIX

The rites involved in purificatory mystery initiations were frequently emotionally shocking.⁴¹⁸ The purifying process however, was considered essential if the initiate was to pass through the stages of the mysteries, which would in turn ease one into the afterlife. The *Empousa* of Aristophanes' *Frogs*, according to Johnston seems to be a 'common descriptive term for the kind of restless soul who tried to frighten, distract and impede initiates during some stage of the initiation process at Eleusis and elsewhere'.⁴¹⁹ The canonical Homeric hymn for the Eleusinian Mysteries, *Hymn to Demeter* (C7 BC), describes Demeter's transmission of her mysteries to humans with their message of hope of salvation for initiates in the afterlife:

She showed the conduct of her rites and taught them all her mysteries, to Triptolemus and Polyxeinus and Diocles also, - awful mysteries which no one may in any way transgress or pry into or utter, for deep awe of the gods checks the voice. Happy is he among men upon earth who has seen these mysteries; but he who is uninitiate and who has no part in them, never has lot of like good things once he is dead, down in the darkness and gloom

480 ff

In the fourth century, Iamblichus defends the divine nature of theurgic initiation where the pure cannot be impeded by evil spirits. He concedes that the practice of theurgy is not without its dangers. It can attract bad daemons but these pose no threat to the theurgist who is pure of heart (*De Myst.* III.31).⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁷ The spectral form at the tomb comes from *Phaedo* 81B and rests on a popular Greek belief (Nock 1926, xcii).

⁴¹⁸ Burkert 1987, 101 ff.

⁴¹⁹ Johnston 1999, 134.

⁴²⁰ *De Abst.*, II.43.1. See above, 31 & 86.

The promise that the cults held out to pagans was the experience of symbolic death and rebirth in this life and a way of perhaps sidestepping the course of fate and escaping the evils of the world; and after death the promise of, if not immortality, at least protection from an unpleasant afterlife. The fundamental idea of death and rebirth in the mysteries was expressed in different ways in different cults. The words ‘I escaped from evil, I found the better’ from ancient Dionysiac initiation could be applied to many of these experiences.⁴²¹ The taurobolium practiced in the Metroac Mysteries was a dramatic enactment of the idea.⁴²² The blood-soaked initiand (either male or female) emerging from this dramatic procedure would (or was supposed to) have felt elated and liberated. Prudentius states that he who had received the taurobolium was adored by those present as divine.⁴²³ Although there is evidence of the taurobolium being practiced in the fourth century, the cost would have made it prohibitive to many pagans (or conversely, provided the opportunity for a show of wealth).⁴²⁴ Christianity had its own mysteries. The sacraments of the church were freely available to all.

In the fourth century involvement with mystery cults persisted particularly at Rome where as we have seen above, a number of pagan aristocrats were making a self-conscious statement of their adherence to traditional cults (above, 96).⁴²⁵ An altar inscription dedicated by an imperial officer Sextilius Agesoilus Aedisius, (13 August, 376), lists his cultic involvements: ‘Father of Fathers of the Invincible Sun God Mithras, Hierophant of Hecate, Chief Shepherd of Dionysus, reborn unto eternity through the sacrifice of a bull and a ram’ (*CIL* 6.510).⁴²⁶ On the funeral monument of Paulina, wife of the Roman senator Praetextatus can be found the words:

You, O husband, deliver me pure and chaste from the lot of death by the goodness of your teaching, lead me into the temples and dedicate me to the gods as their handmaid. With you as witness, I am initiated into all the mysteries.

⁴²¹ Burkert 1987, 96. See further, Clark 2000, 121 *n.* 3 & *De Abst.*, IV.5.4.

⁴²² See Rutter 1968 for a discussion of the evolving phases of taurobolium in late antiquity. He equates the later phase (4th Century) with Christian baptism against Burkert, (1987, 101), who denies evidence for baptism in pagan mysteries. See also Nock 1933, 69 *ff.*

⁴²³ Nock 1926, *liv-lv*. Prudentius (*Perist.* 10.1006-1050, in Rutter, 239)) describes well the taurobolic ceremony, as does the author of *Carmen Contra Paganos* (see above, 22). See also Firmicus Maternus (*err. prof. rel.* 27.8-28.1).

⁴²⁴ Nock 1933, 70-71.

⁴²⁵ See Lenski, 232. *n.* 124 & Bloch, 204 *f.*

⁴²⁶ Maas, 170.

CIL VI.1779 (=ILS 1259)⁴²⁷

These dedications continued despite (or perhaps because of) Christian opposition from for example, Prudentius⁴²⁸ and Firmicus Maternus, who in his attack on pagan practice, outlines the cults of Isis and Attis, both of which offered victory over death. He describes a mystery scene:

On a certain night, a statue⁴²⁹ is laid flat on its back on a bier, where it is bemoaned in cadenced plaints. Then when the worshippers have had their fill of feigned lamentation, a light is brought in. Next a priest anoints the throats of all who are mourning, and once that is done he whispers in a low murmur:

‘Rejoice, O mystai, our god appears as saved! And we shall find salvation, springing from our woes’.

Err. prof. rel., 22.1⁴³⁰

Firmicus continues, contemptuously:

You bury an idol, you lament an idol, you bring forth from its sepulchre an idol, and having done this unfortunate wretch, you rejoice. You rescue your god, you put together the stony limbs that lie there, you set in position an insensible stone. Your god should thank you, should pay you with equivalent gifts, should be willing to make you his partner. So you should die as he dies, and you should live as he lives

ibid., 22.3

The final sentence here could be seen to condense the essential doctrine of the mystery religions - ‘that the mystae by initiation and ritual acts gained a share in the divine life and a guarantee of immortality’.⁴³¹ A similar idea finds expression in the words of Sallustius: ‘Souls that have lived virtuously are freed from the unreasonable element and purified

⁴²⁷ Croke and Harries, 107.

⁴²⁸ As evidenced by a series of inscriptions at the Vatican sanctuary dating from the 370s to 390s and earlier (Smith 1995, 173).

⁴²⁹ The identity of this god is a matter of controversy (*err. prof. rel.*, C. Forbes 1970 (trans.), 206-7, n. 421).

⁴³⁰ Firmicus is here contrasting the resurrection of a stone idol with that of Christ (22.2).

⁴³¹ Forbes 1970, 207, n. 424.

from all body: so they have union with the gods and govern the whole universe with them' (*Conc. the Gods*, XXI).

Christian attitudes, such as that of Firmicus Maternus, to pagan mystery cults, reveal how Christians were responding to the various cults in the fourth century and also offer a possible reflection of the popularity of these cults with contemporary pagans. The Metroac Mysteries, which were attracting a good deal of attention at the time, drew particularly vitriolic attacks from the above authors and others.⁴³² Different series of contorniates released in the late fourth century as well as accounts of festivals in her honour point to the popularity of Cybele.⁴³³ On the other hand, the Christian writers of the second to fourth centuries pass over the cult of Mithras in almost complete silence. The name of the cult is noticeably absent from Augustine's *De civitate Dei*.⁴³⁴ Mithraism apparently did not pose such a threat to Christian sensibility.

3. The pagan philosopher

Physician of the soul

The notion of the philosopher as a holy man was not a new one in Late Antiquity, nor was the metaphor of sickness of the soul and the role of the philosopher as physician but in the fourth century these tropes took on altered significance. In the third century, Porphyry had referred to the philosopher as 'the priest of the god who rules all' (*De Abst.*, II. 49) and he writes in a letter to his wife that:

....every disturbance and unprofitable desire is removed by the love of true philosophy.
Vain is the word of that philosopher who can ease no mortal trouble. As there is no profit in the physician's art unless it cures the diseases of the body, so there is none in philosophy, unless it expel the troubles of the soul

⁴³² See Croke & Harries 74 *ff.* for examples of anti-pagan polemic of the late fourth century to the sack of Rome in 410. The style of Firmicus Maternus' pamphlet of Christian apologetic (*err. prof. rel.*) suggests that the best defence is attack and the best approach to truth is through a study of error. The author therefore deals less with the truths of Christianity than with the errors of paganism, making it a particularly valuable source for contemporary pagan religion, particularly the mystery religions, available to us (Forbes 1970, 18).

⁴³³ Smith 1995, 175-176.

⁴³⁴ Swerdlow (1991, 62-3) suggests that this could be because of what modern scholars describe as the nature of Mithraism resembling modern free-masonry rather than a religious system.

Ad Marc., 31

This idea endured in the fourth century. In a series of pseudo-Julianic letters⁴³⁵ addressed to Iamblichus the author draws parallels between Iamblichus' and Asclepius' healing powers; 'every noble utterance of yours, every written word is reckoned by me as equivalent to the voice of Hermes, the god of eloquence, or to the hand of Asclepius' (Letter 76, 449 D). And further, Iamblichus should, in imitation of Asclepius' fulfilment of healing mankind, do the same 'as though you were the physician of souls endowed with eloquence' (Letter 78, 419 B). In Letter 79 (406 D), the writer tells Iamblichus that '....you, as though you had been born to save the whole human race, emulate everywhere the hand of Asclepius and pervade all things with the saving power of your eloquence'.

Themistius, in one of his orations on the ethical value of Greek philosophy also uses the metaphor:

... yet most people, not doing these things [practising virtue], take refuge in the word alone and think that they practice philosophy, acting a little like sick people, who listen to the physician carefully, but carry out none of his orders, so that neither do these men, when caring for themselves in this manner, enjoy good health, nor do the former, when they practice philosophy in this way achieve health for their soul

Or. II.31d-32a⁴³⁶

In the writings of Iamblichus we find the new axiom of hieratic Platonism - that there are no holy places but only holy individuals - that became current coinage in the fourth century.⁴³⁷ It becomes evident that these holy individuals were considered by many to be the pagan philosophers who, according to contemporary sources, bore certain characteristics, followed particular models and carried out specific duties.⁴³⁸ The credentials of the religious leader were of importance and the philosopher holy man as

⁴³⁵ Wright (1913, vol. 3, xlix-li) discusses the authorship of these letters (above, 46).

⁴³⁶ Downey 1957, 266.

⁴³⁷ Athanassiadi 1992b, 59.

⁴³⁸ The philosophers under discussion here are those concerned primarily with matters of the soul. Late antique philosophers (and the philosophically-minded) in the fourth century generally held public roles that involved them in civic matters. Bregman (59) describes Themistius, for instance, as a 'nominal pagan with philosophical training'. See Lane Fox 2005, 20-21 on the changing role of the philosopher in the late fourth century.

teacher is well exemplified by Iamblichus. Modern scholarship has revised earlier negative opinions of Iamblichus⁴³⁹ and Athanassiadi for instance describes him as a ‘self-possessed, patient, authoritative and exceptionally understanding teacher,’ who had become a ‘holy man of ample fame’ and who attempted to teach his disciples how to ‘animate a newly structured Platonic and Pythagorean frame of thought by blowing into it Oriental fervour’.⁴⁴⁰

The characteristic qualities required for the vocation of pagan holy man⁴⁴¹ in the fourth century were a religious and moral personality with adherence to intellectual tradition and a high standard of moral conduct.⁴⁴² To these qualities can be added the distinctive state of divine possession achievable by the holy man resulting from this role in the theurgic process. Carried away by divine madness and filled with supernatural power, he was able not only to bring about the separation of his soul from his body but also to make a positive advance into the divine realm. This could be brought about by contemplation alone (according to Plotinus), but in post Iamblichan Neoplatonism it was more typically the product of theurgic activity (above, 91).⁴⁴³

The prophetic spirit of the gods was no longer confined to the oracular establishments, but rather could be found in the man or woman who, through abstinence and knowledge, could become the ‘repository of the numinous on earth’.⁴⁴⁴ Initiation into the mysteries of philosophy gave these men the power to interpret oracles and divine signs.⁴⁴⁵ Eunapius attests the powers of such philosophers - Eustathius at Capadocia, his wife Sosipatra and their son Antoninus in Egypt for instance. Within Julian's circle, Maximus of Ephesus was universally recognised for his oracular wisdom.⁴⁴⁶ Late antique philosophers took the role

⁴³⁹ Dodds for instance dismissed *de Mysteriis* as a ‘manifesto of irrationalism (1951, 287). Iamblichus was typecast by his contemporaries as ‘an exponent of Higher Nonsense’ due to his theurgic activities (Clark 1989, xii). Clark traces the rise of Iamblichus' reputation (and the re-evaluation of theurgy) through the 1970s and 1980s (1989, n. 4).

⁴⁴⁰ Athanassiadi 1995, 245. Iamblichus had drawn much from Egypt, in particular the milieu (K. Brown 1997, 4). ‘One's view of God depends upon the level of understanding obtained while journeying through ‘the way of Hermes’’ (Fowden 1986, 96). See also Athanassiadi 1995, 246; G. Clark 1989, xvi.

⁴⁴¹ The term ‘holy man’ is gendered for convenience. The Pythagorean model of holiness adopted in late antiquity however included female philosophers.

⁴⁴² Fowden 1982, 36; Dzielska 1986, 171.

⁴⁴³ Fowden 1982, 37.

⁴⁴⁴ Athanassiadi 1992b, 58.

⁴⁴⁵ Athanassiadi 1992b, 59.

⁴⁴⁶ Athanassiadi 1992b, 60.

of 'radical defenders of pagan religion' at both a practical level and also theoretical, working on continual exegeses of, in particular, Platonic theology providing traditional religion with a proper philosophical framework.⁴⁴⁷

The well-favoured model for the holy man was Pythagoras. Pythagoras epitomised the first century wonder-worker Apollonius of Tyana who in the fourth century still merited a good deal of admiration from both pagans and Christians. In the West, the pagan senator Nichomachus Flavianus translated from Greek to Latin a copy of Philostratus' *Life of the pagan holy man, Apollonius of Tyana*,⁴⁴⁸ the second century model for the Pythagorean way of life. Apollonius was upheld as a rival to Christ by pagans in the east and west of the empire. The comparison drawn between Apollonius and Christ by the philosopher Sossianus Hierocles⁴⁴⁹ had drawn sharp reactions from Eusebius in *Contra Hierocles* around 303 and also Lactantius in the early fourth century.⁴⁵⁰ Christians in the late fourth century, Augustine for instance, grudgingly acknowledged the miracles of Apollonius (except when his 'magic' skills were compared favourably with the miracles of Jesus).⁴⁵¹ However Augustine complains about pagan attachment to Apollonius and also to Apuleius who was often compared with Jesus as a miracle worker. Ambrose is believed to have added his voice in disapproval of the comparison.⁴⁵² The debate between Christians and pagans about the veracity of their miracle workers brought Apollonius to public notice advancing his popularity. Apollonius also shared a close historical connection with the healing god Asclepius. The temple at Aegeae was particularly significant in Apollonius' life as the centre for his studies and medical practice.⁴⁵³

Fourth century pagan sources such as Libanius attest the esteem in which Apollonius was held - he considers that Julian's exemplary way of life is closely analogous to Apollonius' (*Or.* XVI.56) and Ammianus includes Apollonius in his trio of pagan holy men along with Hermes Trismegistus and Plotinus (21.14.). These three, to Ammianus, are amongst those outstanding men on whom the faculty of perceiving their guardian spirits has been

⁴⁴⁷ Smith 1990,127.

⁴⁴⁸ Averil Cameron 1993, 22; Dzielska, 170. This appears to have been the first edition of Philostratus' *VA* into Latin.

⁴⁴⁹ See above, 49, *n.*193

⁴⁵⁰ Dzielska, 154 *ff.*

⁴⁵¹ Dzielska, 178.

⁴⁵² Dzielska, 180.

⁴⁵³ Dzielska, 62-64.

bestowed.⁴⁵⁴ Eunapius also adulates Apollonius and those who have followed in his steps (VS, 347 & 543). The author of the *Historia Augusta* includes Apollonius in a line-up of images of holy-men - Orpheus, Abraham and Christ to be found in the lararium of Severus Alexander.⁴⁵⁵ The image of Apollonius on one of the shield portraits in the collection discussed below (107) coupled with one of Pythagoras who represents the 'archetypal spiritual philosopher' emphasises his importance as a fourth century model of holiness.⁴⁵⁶

In the first century AD Apollonius and Jesus had experienced the common problem of convincing the world that they were not *magi* but took their inspiration for wonder-working from legitimate sources (Porphyry considered Jesus a practicing theurgist).⁴⁵⁷ According to witnesses, hostile or otherwise, miraculous events could be construed as true religion, testimonies to the power of the relevant god, or conversely, as manifestations of magic inspired by demonic powers.⁴⁵⁸

In the fourth century, pagan wonder-workers, Iamblichus for instance, found it necessary to occasionally, and under duress, show their extraordinary abilities in response to Christian claims of miracle working. Eunapius provides an account of three incidents in Iamblichus' life where he - reluctantly- demonstrates his divine nature through super-human feats (VS, 459-60). For the most part though, pagans were well advised to keep silent about matters of divine inspiration. Eunapius tells us that Iamblichus' dedicated disciple Aedesius (who would later become Julian's tutor) and other distinguished disciples 'leaned towards and inclined to a silence appropriate to the mysteries, and a reserve worthy of a hierophant'.⁴⁵⁹ It was after all a time when Constantine was emperor and was pulling down the most celebrated pagan temples and building Christian churches (VS, 461).⁴⁶⁰ Despite this curtailment of pagan activities Maximus was always willing to demonstrate his skills in animating a statue of Hecate with its self lighting magic torches, and it was this

⁴⁵⁴ Hamilton, 32.

⁴⁵⁵ Smith 1990, 142.

⁴⁵⁶ Smith 1990, 143.

⁴⁵⁷ Berchman, 47.

⁴⁵⁸ Versnel, 183.

⁴⁵⁹ As we have seen (above, 46 & 55) Augustine also downplayed miracles at this time, but for different reasons.

⁴⁶⁰ See Penella 1990, p. 141-142 for passages in Eunapius' VS illustrating the restrictions under which pagans operated in the later fourth century.

form of Neoplatonic ‘theatrical’ wonder-working that attracted Julian to this tutor (VS, 475).⁴⁶¹

This then was the paradigm for the late fourth century holy man. Miracles, healing powers, philosophical tenets and an ascetic program for daily living were the hallmarks of the model of a pagan holy man. The late third and fourth centuries saw a resurgence of interest in the Pythagorean way of life as evidenced by works such as Porphyry's *Vita Pythagorea*. Iamblichus also added his contribution to this trend in *De Vita Pythagorica* in which he calls Pythagoras his ‘cosmic saviour’, the exemplary divine man and archetype towards which we all should strive in lifestyle and in personal relationships.⁴⁶² Pythagoras was considered at this time to be the ‘patron saint of theurgical Neoplatonism’, he was deemed the ‘archetypal spiritual philosopher’.⁴⁶³ The Pythagorean model as expounded in these works could be seen as a ‘counterblast’ to Christian gospel in its flexible ideal and appeal to ordinary people.⁴⁶⁴

Iamblichus’ work on the life of Pythagoras provided him with a tool for conveying the model that he considered the most apt way of life that philosophers should both adhere to and teach their pupils so that they may understand and transmit divine wisdom.⁴⁶⁵ This is the model of holy man that Julian adopted in his plan to instate some semblance of organisation into paganism in response to the highly organised structure of the Christian church⁴⁶⁶ Julian recognised what was lacking in paganism - a ‘visible, integrated, spiritually authoritative priesthood’.⁴⁶⁷ In a rather urgent letter to Arsacius, high priest of Galatia, Julian expresses his concerns about this matter. The letter outlines the required code of behaviour and a program of piety for not only priests, but also their families, to be adhered to under threat of dismissal. New trends in the pagan theological system called for

⁴⁶¹ Neoplatonic wonder-workers such as Proclus and Isidore continued to operate in the fifth century (E. Clarke, 2001, 23). See *ibid.*, (35, n. 35) for contemporary catalogues of Neoplatonic miracles and Athanassiadi (1993, 122-123) regarding the idea of divinity residing in statues.

⁴⁶² Clark 1989, 27.

⁴⁶³ Smith 1990, 143.

⁴⁶⁴ Fowden 1977, 381.

⁴⁶⁵ Clark 1989, xv. Iamblichus’ work takes the form of an *imitatio Pythagorae* that provides guidelines on the Pythagorean life for his followers rather than a biographical, historical piece (Athanassiadi 1995, 249; Fowden 1977, 381).

⁴⁶⁶ Athanassiadi 1992a, 33.

⁴⁶⁷ Clark 1989, xii.

a strong priestly model, the man endowed with holiness and knowledge who would lead by example and provide constant guidance for pagans.⁴⁶⁸

Artistic evidence

In artistic representation the figure of the philosopher in the fourth and fifth centuries was taking on a different look from that of the traditional model, taking on a change in shape and expression of the face. A find of marble shield portraits and busts found at Aphrodisias in 1981-2 illustrates these changes.⁴⁶⁹ The pieces represent Late Antique treatment of the classical philosophical model. A portrait in the collection portraying an unknown philosopher epitomises the visual traits of the Late Antique holy man. The sculptor has modelled the shape of his subjects' faces to be longer and narrower with highly modulated contours. Their expression shows a taller brow, lined and knitted, and the eyebrows are flared and arched, altogether giving an impression of dynamism and concentration.⁴⁷⁰ Further evidence of the models taken as representing the new spirit of holiness in the period can be derived from material evidence such as series of contorniates manufactured and distributed in the period.⁴⁷¹ Medallions from the second half of the fourth century carry representations of Apulius (honoured as a philosopher and magician) and Apollonius. This material evidence ties in with the apparent Neoplatonist attachment to the Pythagorean way of life as revealed by the writings of Porphyry and Iamblichus and Nichomachus Flavianus.

The biographies of fourth century philosophers written by Eunapius provide corresponding ideas and terms to give another dimension to the overall portrait⁴⁷² and add a further perspective to our impression of how pagan philosophers presented and were perceived at the time.⁴⁷³ His *Vitae Sophistarum* is an exposition of the circles of pagan philosophers who were located in the Eastern part of the empire. Eunapius had been initiated into the

⁴⁶⁸ Athanassiadi 1992b, 48. See above, 58-9, n.252.

⁴⁶⁹ Smith 1990, 127.

⁴⁷⁰ Smith 1990, 134.

⁴⁷¹ The talismans are first mentioned by Eusebius in *Contra Hieroclem* (Dzielska 1986, 100-101). See Dzielska (1986, 64 ff.) and C.P. Jones (1980, 190-194) for their analyses of the epigram on Apollonius at the Museum of Adana. These contorniates were in all likelihood used as a form of pagan propaganda directed against Christianity (Hägg, 116).

⁴⁷² Smith 1990, 145.

⁴⁷³ Smith hypothesises that the building housing these portraits was a philosophical school (1990, 130 & 153 ff.).

higher mysteries of Neoplatonism by Chrysanthius in around 370 AD.⁴⁷⁴ His information, drawn from written and oral sources as well as his own observations, presents the ideal philosopher as a man of virtue whose divinity is manifested in a turning away from the body and the material world, and who is in possession of preternatural powers⁴⁷⁵ Eunapius' work is representative of a new trend in Late Antique Graeco-Roman biography where philosophers are idealised as superior men and figures of holiness.⁴⁷⁶ We can detect a link between biographers' adoption of divine type in their works with the social situation in which they were produced-that is, heated religious conflicts between pagans and Christians in the third and fourth centuries.⁴⁷⁷

Piety also counts

The trend towards a perceived 'otherworldliness' in some pagan philosophers need not imply that the pagan holy man neglected to visit sacred sites and perform acts of piety. Rather it signifies the philosopher's vocation coming closer to that of the hierophant. Such a holy man of late antiquity was not only renowned for his knowledge about god but also as a demonstrator of piety towards the gods. He continued to honour the gods privately and also ensure that public cults where possible, were conducted in fit and proper manner. The Pythagorean tradition instilled this honouring of the gods at both a private and a public level.⁴⁷⁸ Although the contemporary theological direction tended towards monotheism, traditional polytheistic piety continued and Neoplatonic philosophers could reconcile worship of traditional gods with their monotheistic philosophy.⁴⁷⁹ Pagans were reluctant to relinquish their traditional rituals. A number of fourth century pagan sources emphasise the importance of prayer in religious rites. Iamblichus propounds the value of prayer in completing the act of sacrifice: 'No operation ... in sacred concerns, can succeed without the intervention of prayer' (*De Myst.* V.26). Sallustius values sacrifice with prayer in maintaining good relations with the gods. He claims that '... prayers without sacrifice are mere words , whereas, if sacrifice is added, the words gain life, the word giving power to

⁴⁷⁴ Penella 1990, 8.

⁴⁷⁵ Cox 1983, 145.

⁴⁷⁶ Penella 1990, 33.

⁴⁷⁷ Cox 1983, 65.

⁴⁷⁸ Fowden 1982, 52.

⁴⁷⁹ P. Hadot 1986, 263. Plotinus however eschewed cultic offerings, public hymns and private prayers (Edwards 2004, 214).

the life and the life animating the word' (*Conc. the Gods*, XVI).⁴⁸⁰ Nevertheless, at temples there were enacted regular and frequent rituals for veneration of the gods. A liturgy consisting of the burning of incense and lamps and the singing of hymns has been found in inscriptions at the great Asclepian sanctuary at Epidaurus.⁴⁸¹ Iamblichus exemplifies the idea of philosopher-priest, showing himself to be 'assiduous in the daily round of sacrifice and prayer' (Eunapius *VS*, v 1.6-8, 12) as were Julian, Maximus of Ephesus, Antoninus of Egypt and in the fifth century, Proclus.⁴⁸² Sallustius writes about the consequences of neglecting piety: 'It is not unreasonable to suppose that impiety is a species of punishment and that those who have had knowledge of the gods and yet despised them will in another life be deprived of this knowledge' (*Conc. the Gods*, XVIII).

Hymn writing in the fourth century represents learned literary interests of the time. Neoplatonist pagans of the fourth and fifth centuries made use of prayers and hymns in their move to systemise their philosophy into religion.⁴⁸³ Julian for instance wrote hymns to Helios and to Cybele which reflect his interest in Neoplatonism. Libanius also refers to making offerings to the gods and praying. He describes offering to Zeus an undelivered oration at the same time as worshipping the god with the scent of incense (*Or.I.222*).⁴⁸⁴

The presence of the holy man

Despite the rise of intensely other-worldly systems of thought associated with the Neoplatonic 'school', the role of the philosopher as a candid unshakeable spokesman in the public sphere continued unchanged in Late Antiquity.⁴⁸⁵ Criticism has been levelled at the sage of late antiquity for his inner disengagement and physical withdrawal from the world around him.⁴⁸⁶ Fowden has remarked on the shift of philosophy in Late Antiquity to a more isolated discipline than ever before and observes that 'most philosophers were so

⁴⁸⁰ See Nock, 1926, p. *lxxxv n.* 198 for references for the views held by Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblichus on the importance attached to prayer.

⁴⁸¹ See M.P. Nilsson 1945, p.69.

⁴⁸² Fowden 1982, 53. See further for the importance of hymns, Van den berg, 33 *ff* for the changing emphasis on the verb 'hymn' as a synonym for philosophising about the divine and the reinterpreting of Plato's dialogues as hymns in the fifth century Athenian school of Neoplatonism. In this way the role of the philosopher had become that of theologian singing the praises of the gods.

⁴⁸³ Averil Cameron 1998, 695.

⁴⁸⁴ Libanius is as always mindful of the current laws relating to pagan worship and sacrifice (Norman 1965, 213). See Maas, 177-178, for a selection of laws demonstrating the steady suppression of pagan worship.

⁴⁸⁵ Lane Fox 2005, 19; 20-21; 25. Themistius is an example.

⁴⁸⁶ Meredith 1976, 316.

absorbed by the inner world that they cared little how they appeared in the eyes of society.⁴⁸⁷ Yet the audiences that Plotinus, Aedisius and Iamblichus reached were far beyond the 'inner circle' of disciples and Eunapius claims that Iamblichus 'had a multitude of disciples, and those who desired learning flocked to him from all parts' (*VS.* v 1.4-5). And, according to Porphyry, Plotinus achieved reconciliation between action and contemplation - he was 'able to live at once within himself and for others' (*Vita Plotini*, 8) and exhibited a strong sense of caring for others, for example the orphans in his care (*VP*, 9).⁴⁸⁸ In social status the philosopher-holy man was, however, for the most part the wealthy, land-owning class.⁴⁸⁹ These men and women and their disciples could afford the leisure time to travel- escaping to country retreats for spiritual contemplation or journeying from one circle of learning to another. The degree of knowledge that had to be acquired to place the philosopher in contact with the divine was such that only few could aspire to the title of holy man.

In focussing on the philosopher as a spiritual guide, we must bear in mind the different meaning that philosophy had for people of late antiquity. Philosophy had the purpose of educating the individual towards a happy life (and a diminished fear of death) - that is, a life inwardly strengthened against the vicissitudes of fate.⁴⁹⁰ The seeking of the ideal spiritual guide was a personal matter.⁴⁹¹ Julian travelled around to discover the one teacher who would open up for him the road to spiritual fulfilment as had Plotinus before him (*VP*, 3.7-13).⁴⁹² Julian's particular interest lay in the Iamblichan style of theurgic ritual and he studied with a series of tutors⁴⁹³ until he finally heard of and sought out Maximus of Ephesus, master of the theurgic arts that Julian was interested in, his ideal spiritual guide. Julian describes Maximus as 'superior to all the men of [his] own time'. Maximus, he claims, 'purged me of such infatuate folly and insolence as yours [the Cynic, Heracleios] and tried to make me more temperate than I was by nature' (*Or.* VII.235 A-B).

⁴⁸⁷ Fowden (1982, 54-59) has assembled a good deal of evidence supporting 'unsocial philosophy'. Yet there were philosophically minded pagans who still believed in the civic virtues and involved themselves in the political life of the cities although the lure of the countryside and its isolation was strong (57-58).

⁴⁸⁸ *Vita Plotini* in MacKenna, 1-20.

⁴⁸⁹ Fowden 1982, 49 ff.

⁴⁹⁰ I. Hadot 1986, 444.

⁴⁹¹ See Fowden (1977) 379 for how he envisages philosophical circles of the fourth century were structured.

⁴⁹² Athanassiadi 1995, 245.

⁴⁹³ Fowden 1982, 39.

From the Chaldean Oracles we learn that ‘it is the mission of the Chaldean theurgist to help the soul in [this] distress: they show her the way which leads to a deliverance from all earthly affliction and return her to her pure primitive state.’⁴⁹⁴ This idea is reflected in the writings of Iamblichus which suggest a personalised type of theurgy, designed by the theurgist to suit the individual ‘soul’. He writes that each individual soul has different needs and the theurgist is qualified to interpret this need and prescribe the right steps to involve the soul in the rhythm of creation.⁴⁹⁵

In the same way that pagan philosophers called themselves ‘physician of the soul’, so did the church fathers following the example of Christ, the ultimate *medicus* – ‘the Great Physician’.⁴⁹⁶ The church writers inherited and exploited the positive metaphorical value of the idea of the physician as one who unstintingly cares for the sick, administering painful means of cure and prescribing regimen for the maintenance of health. The Cappadocian fathers expanded this imagery to represent the bishop as healer of souls. Gregory of Nazianzus compares Saint Basil's work as bishop of Caesarea to that of a physician, describing his applying soothing or harsh words as required to cure sinful souls just as physicians apply sweet and bitter medicines in their remedies. By the fifth century the image of the bishop as a spiritual physician had become commonplace throughout the East.⁴⁹⁷

Conclusion

We have looked at ways in which pagans of the fourth century might seek to escape from their sufferings in the world and commune with the divine. The investigation has involved religious and philosophical matters. The pagan concept of the soul as an entity separable from the body, allowed that this entity could, given the right circumstances, return to her ‘safe harbour’. The pagan practice of asceticism was in agreement with traditional ideas of maintaining health and purification of the body and mind to this end. Christian ideas on the subject however were complicated by a doctrine of bodily resurrection. The spirit trapped

⁴⁹⁴ Lewy, 184.

⁴⁹⁵ Shaw 1985, 26.

⁴⁹⁶ Amundsen 1996, 133 & *n.* 21.

⁴⁹⁷ Allan, 448.

within this body was in constant threat of danger from the 'weakness of the flesh', and could only be released through the grace of God, not by its own volition.

The philosophy of Neoplatonists represented an articulate and intellectual form of paganism.⁴⁹⁸ Not many could aspire to knowledge of the deep secrets of philosophical mysteries. We see however that some effort was being made to 'democratise' pagan philosophy by attaching to it cultic ritual. The investigation has revealed a strong interest in a number of the oriental cults that had entered the empire. These religions conveyed personal spiritual benefit for pagans where civic cult might be seen to be wavering. Neoplatonism gave expression to elements of these cults that offered satisfaction for the individual soul.⁴⁹⁹ Julian was one who was well aware of the need to make answer to the way Christians were conducting their religion. His adherence to the Iamblichan model of paganism gave prominence to practices that were rooted in tradition yet also popularised new trends. He gave voice to paganism in his writings and in his religious practice he set an example of piety.

⁴⁹⁸ Liebeschuetz 1979, 234.

⁴⁹⁹ Showerman, 167.

CONCLUSION

The central argument presented in this thesis is that pagans of the fourth century, experiencing the increasing presence of Christianity, responded in characteristic pagan fashion to challenges that confronted them. Pagans had a multifarious relationship with the divine world. This relationship was manifested in the precise and proper administration of public cult which not only reinforced the past but assured future protection of Rome and her people. Individuals understood that a high level of personal religious piety expressed through religious acts (prayer, sacrifice or votive offerings) either at shrines or in the home was important in their relationship with the divine. But the familiar landscape of paganism was altered and the customary frameworks within which pagan cult functioned previously deemed unshakeable had been disrupted. In the light of these changes, pagans were experiencing some constraints to their traditional ways of dealing with the miseries that plague humans and bring about suffering. Traditional systems needed to be rethought and adjusted or adapted to a set of quite novel circumstances. The present work has evaluated a range of evidence, mostly textual, in order to elicit firstly, how it was that pagans understood evil and suffering; secondly, where pagans looked for hope in the face of misfortune and thirdly, how much autonomy pagans could claim in overcoming suffering. The evidence gathered from contemporary writers and commentators (and selected visual evidence) represents the pagan perspective on these questions. The chapters examine how individual pagans might understand and deal with the miseries of life now compounded by the unprecedented change and challenges taking place in the fourth century.

The first chapter explored the essence of traditional Roman paganism – the assumption that protection of the empire and her people by the ancestral gods will follow from correct worship of these gods. The shift of imperial support away from the fixtures of traditional piety drew a strong response from some pagans who wished to preserve long-held ritual for fear of losing this protection. The written responses examined in this chapter revealed a degree of anxiety growing out of the perceived disruption of the relationship between Rome and the gods.

The following chapters addressed in turn how Late Antique pagans sought to understand or explain the origins of the suffering that arose in different aspects of their lives. The second chapter addressed the field of health in which the evidence shows that the scientific and

philosophical theories of Hippocrates and Galen found affirmation in the fourth-century writings of Oribasius. These theories went a long way in explaining the causes of sickness both mental and physical and in advancing appropriate treatment. Traditional medical and magical cures overlapped in circulating handbooks such as Marcellus' *de Medicamentis*. The healing god Asclepius continued to receive the suffering in his remaining temples and offer healing through the medium of dream.

The fortunes of men and women were understood by many to be in the control of supernatural forces manifested through the agency of entities such as *Fortuna* or *Tyche* and a host of daemonic beings. The idea of strict determinism however is not conducive to taking control of the course one's life might take (or to striving for moral excellence). The third chapter explored contemporary concepts of those personified forces commonly believed to direct the course of people's lives. This led to an examination of ideas that relate to determinism. It was argued that divination as a means of glimpsing and preparing for the future was attractive to pagans. The practicing of divination had always carried some risk and in the fourth century although censure of the practice had escalated pagans still attached a good deal of importance to the 'art'. Astrology was one form of divination that maintained a general attitude of acceptance amongst pagan thinkers although it was thoroughly condemned by Christians. Oneiromancy on the other hand, found favour and acceptance with both pagans and Christians in the fourth century albeit, with differing emphasis.

Polytheism gave paganism an inherent quality of tolerance regarding various belief systems, thus allowing for adaptability in philosophical and religious thinking. Pagans accepted a broad range of exotic elements (including Christianity) whilst drawing on traditional beliefs and practices. Chapter four investigated how ancient philosophy furnished pagans of Late Antiquity with the basis for religious thought and ritual that concerned the release of the soul from the body into a state of 'blissful immortality'. A revived interest in the life and works of Pythagoras provided a model for pagans to emulate in order to facilitate this. Significantly, contemporary philosophy (Neoplatonism) gave the soul self-sufficiency in finding salvation (although the idea of grace was given consideration by some philosophers) and by adding external rites, provided a bridge to the divine.

The subtext or underlying theme emerging from the investigation involves the issues of change, reaction and response by pagans to the presence of Christianity. We must bear in mind that both pagan and Christian thinkers of the fourth century had received a similar education and were familiar with the traditional disciplines of philosophy, science, history and literature. The rhetoric that developed in the fourth century between pagans and Christians evolved from this learning. The employment of a number of the same ideas and practices by both pagans and Christians (the exchange of ideas worked both ways) contributed to the development of parallel systems of thought which is reflected in the present study.

The key point that emerges from the research is that there was a self-conscious effort on the part of pagan thinkers to acknowledge and respond to the changed circumstances in which they were now operating. Pagans could not ignore the disruption of their usual belief structures. This is evidenced by the writings of pagans such as Symmachus and Libanius who deplored the plight of paganism and Iamblichus and Julian (and Sallustius) who although mindful of tradition, nevertheless contrived to identify new directions that paganism needed to take in response to the current situation. The former are representative of conservative paganism with its adherence to rites made authentic through generations of performance; the latter represent expression of paganism that reflects the emotional needs of people living in a time of significant change. The responses of these men (along with other pagans and also some Christians) when examined in the context of the initial questions posed reveal certain aspects of paganism that concern how pagans endeavoured to understand and deal with evil and suffering.

We can see that pagans were addressing the need to make sense of evil and suffering by drawing on traditional sets of ideas. Where these ideas appeared inadequate in the presence of Christianity, they were revised. A framework of philosophy joined with religion and with science preserved some semblance of tradition and ritual. Pagan thinkers were reinterpreting and augmenting traditional philosophies (particularly Platonic) and expressing them in an idiom that attempted to make sense of a world where familiar tradition and ritual were disrupted. Determinism played a significant role in the lives of pagans, attested by the popularity of all forms of divination. Natural and supernatural forces could be understood to communicate messages to 'receptive' humans, revealing

hidden secrets of the universe. But the potential for escape from the mundane held out by the more mystical practices meant that people could shift away from the limits imposed by *Heimarmene*. Inherent in this fourth century thought-world were notions of personal piety and virtue, which combined with other-worldly religious ritual could give pagans a degree of autonomy in the way they conducted themselves in a difficult world.

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