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LATE NEOPLATONIC DISCOURSES ON SUICIDE AND THE QUESTION OF CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY PROFESSORS AT ALEXANDRIA

MICHAEL PAPAZIAN
*Berry College**

Abstract: The later Neoplatonic commentaries attributed to David and Elias are considered by many scholars to be the work of Christians who dominated the Alexandrian school in the latter half of the sixth century. Christian Wildberg has challenged this prevailing view: he argues that the commentaries are more likely the work of pagan philosophers. Scholars who support Christian authorship have appealed to the strict prohibition against suicide expressed in the parts of the commentaries that discuss Socrates' characterization in the *Phaedo* of philosophy as the practice of death. But the proscription of suicide that the commentators read into the *Phaedo* is consistent with the teachings of pagan Neoplatonists and thus provides no basis for a rejection of Wildberg's thesis. I discuss the literary and historical exempla that the commentators use and propose that these are drawn in part from Gregory of Nazianzus' *Invective against Julian*. The connection between the discourses and Gregory's text suggests that the commentators may have been deliberately responding to his accusations of pagan hypocrisy.

Keywords: Neoplatonism, suicide, Alexandria, Christian-pagan relations, Gregory of Nazianzus

The scholarly literature on late ancient philosophy generally affirms that by the second half of the sixth century the Neoplatonic school in Alexandria had become a Christian institution.[1] Surviving commentaries on Porphyry's *Isagoge* and Aristotle's logical works bear the names 'David' and 'Elias', suggesting that the Alexandrian school not only had Christian students but Christian professors of philosophy as well.[2] Christian Wildberg has challenged this assumption of Christian dominance.[3] Wildberg focuses on the introductions to the commentaries attributed to Ammonius, Elias and David on Porphyry's *Isagoge*. These introductions are also often referred to as *Prolegomena of Philosophy*. Wildberg argues that none of these introductions has any clear Christian content and all contain doctrines that are contrary to Christian teaching. Furthermore, the names 'David' and 'Elias' have only a tenuous connection with the manuscript traditions.

Wildberg is certainly correct about the manuscript tradition associated with David. The oldest extant Greek manuscripts of David's *Prolegomena* are from the 11th century and do not contain any attribution to David but are either anonymous or attributed to Elias or the 10th-century Byzantine scholar Nicetas of Paphlagonia (whose monastic name was David). The earliest Greek manuscript in which David is identified as the author dates from the 14th century. Though Wildberg does not discuss the Armenian manuscript tradition, the oldest surviving Armenian manuscripts of David's introduction are from the 13th century. At least one of these 13th-century manuscripts

* mpapazian@berry.edu. I would like to thank two *JHS* referees as well as the editor for very valuable and helpful comments and corrections. I am also grateful to Andrea Lowry Papazian for her careful reading of and suggestions on earlier drafts.

[1] A small sample includes R. Sorabji, 'The ancient commentators on Aristotle' and L.G. Westerink, 'The Alexandrian commentators and the introductions to their commentaries', in R. Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle Transformed* (Ithaca 1990) 14 and 338; F.A.J. de Haas, 'Late ancient philosophy', in D. Sedley (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Philosophy* (Cambridge 2003) 246; J. Marenbon, *Medieval Philosophy* (London 2007) 56.

[2] There is no doubt that John Philoponus was a Christian, but he bore the title *grammatikos*, indicating perhaps that he held a chair in grammar rather than philosophy: see R. Sorabji (ed), *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science* (London 1987) 5–6.

[3] C. Wildberg, 'Three Neoplatonic introductions to philosophy: Ammonius, David, and Elias', *Hermathena* 149 (1990) 33–51.

contains an attribution to David.[4] Wildberg speculates that the 'good Christian' name of 'David' was perhaps attached to the manuscript by a Byzantine copyist in an effort to ensure its preservation. Concerning the content of the work, Wildberg points to numerous examples of pagan Neoplatonist teachings, among them the eternity of the world, the immortality of the soul and the mention solely of Platonic and not Christian virtues. He concludes that '[i]f we possessed the anonymous manuscripts alone, nobody would regard this tractate as a piece of Christian literature'.[5]

Scholars who do incline toward a Christian provenance for the introductions of David and Elias sometimes point to the discussions of suicide in the sections concerned with the Platonic definition of philosophy as the 'practice of death'. Richard Sorabji observes that 'the condemnation of suicide increasingly prevailed in the sixth century, so that while Olympiodorus, a pagan, can still defend suicide in special circumstances, the Christian David forbids it'.[6] L.G. Westerink notes that Olympiodorus' more permissive attitude in the commentary on the *Phaedo* 'conflicts with Christian ethics … and must have been very shocking to Christian sentiment'.[7] He elsewhere remarks that Olympiodorus' successors, who he says are all Christians, return to an unconditional rejection of suicide.[8] Gerard Verbeke also singles out Olympiodorus' acceptance of suicide in some circumstances and remarks that it diverges from Christian doctrine.[9] David's absolute prohibition of suicide is all the more striking when contrasted with Olympiodorus' attitude, since David was a member of the school of Olympiodorus and perhaps even a student of his. It is therefore understandable to see a Christian commitment behind David's stance in this matter.[10] Wildberg does not discuss the treatment of suicide by the Alexandrians in his paper.

A full assessment of Wildberg's thesis therefore demands an examination of the later Neoplatonic discourses on suicide found in the introductions. Do the views expressed in them on the permissibility of suicide have any bearing on the question of the Christian or pagan authorship of these introductions? This paper aims to answer that question by examining the extant discourses (including the introduction to philosophy of Pseudo-Elias, which was edited by Westerink[11] but not discussed by Wildberg) and attempts to determine the purpose of the inclusion of these discourses in the introductions. In examining the discourses, we will find that the motivations and implications of their treatment of suicide are more nuanced and that the discourses on suicide do

[4] For the Armenian manuscript tradition, see B. Kendall and R.W. Thomson, *Definitions and Divisions of Philosophy by David the Invincible Philosopher* (Chico CA 1983), which reprints the edition of Arewshatyan; V. Calzolari and J. Barnes (eds), *L'œuvre de David l'Invincible et la transmission de la pensée grecque dans la tradition arménienne et syriaque* (Leiden 2009) 55–56. The inclusion of the Armenian manuscripts in studying questions about David's works is especially important if Calzolari is correct that the Armenian translation of David's introduction is based on a no longer extant Greek manuscript: see V. Calzolari, 'La version arménienne des *Prolegomena Philosophiae* de David et son rapport avec le texte grec', in Calzolari and Barnes (above) 39–64. All Armenian transliterations in this paper follow the system of *REArm.*

[5] Wildberg (n.3) 44–45.

[6] R. Sorabji, *The Philosophy of the Commentators: 200–600 AD* 1 (Ithaca 2005) 350–51.

[7] L.G. Westerink, *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* (Amsterdam 1962) xviii.

[8] L.G. Westerink, 'Elias und Plotin', *Byzantinsche Zeitschrift* 57 (1964) 26–32.

[9] G. Verbeke, 'Some later Neoplatonic views on divine creation and the eternity of the world', in D.J. O'Meara, *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought* 2 (Albany 1982) 46.

[10] One must be careful not to assume the existence of a fixed and universally accepted Christian teaching on suicide or suppose that all Christians condemned what we would recognize as suicide. Indeed, some like the young Origen seem to have eagerly sought out martyrdom, an impulse that both ancients and moderns would recognize as a suicidal drive induced by religious fanaticism. Some early Christian authors allow suicide in the case of virgins threatened with rape: see D.W. Amundsen, 'Suicide and early Christian values', in B. Brody (ed.), *Suicide and Euthanasia: Historical and Contemporary Themes* (Dordrecht 1989) 77–152; see also J. Cooper, 'Greek philosophers on euthanasia and suicide' in Brody (above) 9–38 for a comprehensive discussion of ancient thought on suicide.

[11] L.G. Westerink, *Pseudo-Elias (Pseudo-David), Lectures on Porphyry's Isagoge* (Amsterdam 1967). Westerink demonstrates that these lectures are the work of neither Elias nor David, are later than Elias and perhaps contemporaneous with David, and were most likely given at Constantinople.

not shed as much light on the authors' religion as Sorabji, Westerink and Verbeke suppose and by themselves provide little, if any, support for the Christian commitment of the later commentators known to us as Elias and David. Indeed, there was no sharp dichotomy between Christians and pagans in antiquity on the question of suicide; instead, one finds both Christians and pagans assuming a range of positions on whether suicide is ever permissible. The strict prohibition of suicide found in the later commentators is consistent with the views expressed by Plotinus and Porphyry[12], and need not be understood as a new development that implies a Christian orientation of the commentators.

In particular, the focus here is on the literary and historical examples used by the authors of the discourses. The coincidence of examples in the texts with those in Gregory of Nazianzus' *Invective against Julian* may indicate that the commentators were consciously responding to Gregory's accusations that Julian extolled the pagan examples of suicide and sacrifice while deprecating Christian martyrdom. The Neoplatonic philosophers seem to be deliberately distancing themselves from the Stoa, which they portray as having been unjustifiably permissive in its teachings on suicide. The strict line against suicide in some of the Neoplatonic discourses accordingly may be read as an understandably defensive reaction by non-Christians to a Christian polemic against pagan suicide rather than an indication of a Christian takeover of the Alexandrian school.

We begin with a review of the discourses and their content followed by an examination of the historical and literary examples used in the discourses.

I. The later Neoplatonic discourses on suicide

The discourses on suicide appear in introductions to the *Isagoge* of Ammonius (4.15–5.31), Elias (12.13–16.8), David (29.13–34.12) and Pseudo-Elias (12.1–13.27).[13] Olympiodorus also has a discussion of suicide in his commentary on the *Phaedo* (Lecture 1.1–9).[14] Olympidorus' introduction, in which he most probably dealt with the problem of suicide, is lost and his treatment of suicide in the *Phaedo* commentary, though distinctive, partially overlaps in its content with the other discourses. Olympiodorus stands apart for his fanciful allegorical readings and appeal to Orphic mysticism, but he also distinguishes himself by allowing suicide in certain cases, and thus dissents even from the pagan Ammonius on this point.

The discourses are ostensibly occasioned by an exegetical problem in the *Phaedo*. Socrates at 61b appears to encourage Evenus to follow him (that is, kill himself) as soon as possible if he be temperate (ἂν σωφρονῇ, ἐμὲ διώκειν ὡς τάχιστα). This counsel is almost immediately followed by Socrates' claim at 61c that 'they say that [taking one's life] is not permitted'. The philosophical life involves the desire to die and yet active pursuit of death is supposedly illicit. Socrates goes on to report a doctrine that men are in a kind of prison or guard-post (62b) and must not kill themselves unless god sends some necessity (ἀνάγκην τινὰ) upon them. What, then, does it mean to say that philosophy is the practice of death, as Socrates asserts at 64a? The Neoplatonic commentators are expounding on the difficulties entailed by what they take to be a Platonic definition of philosophy.[15]

[12] See especially Plot. 1.9; Porph. *Abst.* 1.38, 2.47.

[13] Ammonius, *in Porphyrii Isagogen*, (Berlin 1895 = *CAG* IV, 3); Elias, *in Porphyrii Isagogen* (Berlin 1900 = *CAG* XVIII, 1); David, *Prolegomena et in Porphyrii Isagogen* (Berlin 1904; *CAG* XVIII, 2).

[14] L.G. Westerink, *The Greek Commentaries on Plato's* Phaedo 1 (Westbury 2009). For a detailed discussion of Olympiodorus on suicide, see S.R.P Gertz, *Death and Immortality in Late Neoplatonism: Studies on the Ancient Commentaries on Plato's* Phaedo (Leiden 2011) chapter 2.

[15] For discussion of this part of the *Phaedo* and its implications on suicide, see Cooper (n.10) and M. Tuominen, 'Tell him to follow me as quickly as possible – Plato's *Phaedo* 60c–63c on taking one's own life', in M-L. Honkasalo and M. Tuominen (eds), *Culture, Suicide, and the Human Condition* (New York 2014). I am grateful to a referee of this journal for referring me to the latter.

The earliest of the discourses, that of Ammonius, is also the briefest. Ammonius begins by presenting the Platonic definition of philosophy as the practice of death and then proceeds to explain the proper way to understand the practice of death (4.15–17). He presents what will become the standard example of the misguided student of Plato, Cleombrotus (4.18–21), who kills himself after reading the *Phaedo*. He recites the epigram of Callimachus on Cleombrotus (4.22–25) and then adduces *Phaedo* 62b to try to establish that Plato did not approve of suicide (4.26–5.3), after which he briefly expounds on the injunction against suicide (5.3–6). He explains that Plato distinguished between the natural (φυσικός) bond by which the body is tied to the soul and is animated by it, and the voluntary or chosen (προαιρετικός) bond according to which the soul is tied to the body and serves (δουλεύουσα) and is ruled (κεκρατημένη) by it (5.11–14). Corresponding to these are natural death, which all humans suffer, in which the body is separated from the soul, and chosen death, which occurs in philosophers who practice separating the soul from the rule of the body (5.15–19). This chosen death, which is found in all of the later Neoplatonic commentators, may be based on the purificatory virtues (καθαρτικαὶ ἀρεταί), which are discussed by Plotinus and Porphyry,[16] thus suggesting another continuity between early and late Neoplatonism. Even after natural death, the souls of the 'body-lovers' (φιλοσώματοι) honour the desires of the body and so they do not experience the chosen death of the philosophers (5.19–21). Alluding to *Phaedo* 81d, Ammonius notes that some say these body-loving souls become apparitions that inhabit graveyards (5.21–23).[17] The philosophers who practice death remain naturally alive even though they strive toward chosen death (5.23–27).

Olympiodorus' discourse on suicide is in his commentary on *Phaedo* 61c9–62c9. He presents two sets of arguments – one 'Orphic and mystical' and the other 'philosophical and dialectical' – to show that Socrates is not advocating suicide (1.1). Before presenting the arguments, though, he gives his own arguments against suicide (1.2). The first argument is from the philosopher's similarity to god, who is able to be at once elevative and providential, meaning that god can care for inferior 'secondary beings' while also remaining divine. Just as god remains present to all humans, so too the soul should remain present to the secondary and inferior body even while it engages in philosophy. He further argues that a voluntary connection may be ended voluntarily, but since we did not connect the soul to the body, neither should it be unfastened by us (1.2.3).

After this, Olympiodorus turns to the text of the *Phaedo*. The mythical argument invokes the four reigns of Uranus, Kronos, Zeus and Dionysus (1.3).[18] Humans were created from the soot of vapours of Titans, who had eaten Dionysus' flesh. Thus, our bodies belong to Dionysus, and to destroy them would be to do an injustice against Dionysus. Olympiodorus believes that this esoteric reading is appropriate because Socrates himself at 62b3 calls the reason for prohibiting suicide 'secret' (ἀπόρρητον). Also, the four reigns stand as an allegory for the four virtues (the contemplative, civic, ethical and natural), with Dionysus representing the ethical and natural (ἠθικὰς καὶ φυσικὰς) virtues, since these virtues are separable and thus akin to Dionysus' divided body (1.4). To kill oneself is therefore to act in an ethically vicious way. Finally, Dionysus is the ruler of genesis in so far as he is the ruler of life and death, both of which are associated with inspiration (ἐνθουσία). The implication is that suicide usurps Dionysus' proper lordship over life and death.

[16] See Plot. 1.2.3 and Porph. *Sent*. 32, especially lines 26–28, where the purificatory virtue of courage is defined as not fearing being away from the body (τὸ δὲ μὴ φοβεῖσθαι ἀφισταμένην τοῦ σώματος). I am grateful to a referee of this journal for drawing my attention to this connection.

[17] Similarly, Porph. *Abst.* 2.47 notes that souls violently torn from their bodies remain by their bodies. Porphyry gives this as a reason against both animal sacrifice and suicide. I am grateful to a referee for pointing out this passage.

[18] For an illuminating discussion of this passage, see L. Brisson, 'L'anthropogenie décrite dans le commentaire sur le Phédon de Platon (1, par. 3–6) attribué à Olympiodure est-elle orphique?', in M.-O. Goulet-Cazé and G. Madec (eds), *ΣΟΦΙΗΣ ΜΑΙΗΤΟΡΕΣ Chercheurs de sagesse: Hommage à Jean Pépin* (Paris 1992) 481–99.

In the dialectical argument Olympiodorus states that committing suicide would be an unjust rejection of the gods' guardianship and ownership (1.5). He nevertheless recognizes that there are exceptional cases in which suicide may be permitted, following what he takes to be Plato's acknowledgment at 62c that some great necessity may warrant suicide. He believes Plato to have permitted suicide to the wise, to an intermediate group of people and to the inferior: *Phaedo* 62c is said to support suicide for the wise, *Republic* 407d4–e2 counsels suicide for those with a long, untreatable disease and *Laws* 854a5–c5 advises it for the inferior many who cannot control their erotic desire for their mother (ἔρωτι μητρὸς) or for temple-robbery.

Olympiodorus bases his next argument in favour of permitting some cases of suicide on the title of Plotinus' treatise (*Enneads* 1.9) on justified suicide (περὶ εὐλόγου ἐξαγωγῆς). He infers from the title that Plotinus must have accepted the existence of justified suicide even though the treatise in fact rejects it, revealing, as Westerink points out,[19] that he had neither read the treatise nor otherwise knew of its content.

Olympiodorus then introduces the Stoic analogy of life with a banquet[20] and presents the five reasons that Stoics said could justify suicide (1.6): (1) a great necessity (μεγάλην χρείαν), as when Menoeceus sacrificed his life for his country; (2) abusive language (αἰσχρορρημοσύνη) that forces one to reveal secrets, illustrated by the case of a Pythagorean woman ordered in turn to reveal why Pythagoreans abstain from beans and to eat beans; (3) senility; (4) incurable disease; and (5) poverty, when there is no possibility of receiving support from good people. He closes his discourse with his own opinion on the permissibility of suicide. He says that suicide may only be justified when the soul gains a greater good as a result, as when the soul is disabled (βλάπτεται) by the body (1.9).

Elias' discourse begins at 12.3 with his introduction of the definition of philosophy as the practice of death. He then notes the objection that Plato's definition, taken literally, contradicts what Socrates says about suicide at *Phaedo* 62b (12.13–20). His response is to draw the distinction familiar from Ammonius between natural and chosen death (12.20–13.6). Since the chosen bond is one that we have tied, we are entitled to dissolve it by seeking chosen death, but the natural connection between the soul and body was not made by us (13.6–12). The four states (natural life, natural death, chosen life, chosen death) combine in six ways, depicted as a square of opposition in the manuscripts (13.18–23). Table 1 represents the combinations.

	Natural life	*Natural death*	*Chosen life*	*Chosen death*
Natural life	X	Explicitly incoherent (ἀσύστατον)	Undisciplined way of life in which the soul does not control the body (13.32–14.1)	The soul controls the body and eschews the pleasure-passions (ἡδυπαθείας) (13.25–27)
Natural death		X	'Body-loving' (φιλοσώματοι) ghosts or apparitions (13.28–31)	Incoherent (ἀσύστατον) because body no longer exists and so cannot be controlled by soul
Chosen life			X	Explicitly incoherent (ἀσύστατον)

Table 1. The combinations of the four states in Elias.

[19] Westerink (n.8) 30.

[20] The Neoplatonic commentators are the only extant sources for this allegedly Stoic analogy and list of justifications. A surviving ancient philosophical text that vaguely resembles this list is Plato *Lg.* 873c. Three reasons that would excuse the suicide from the legal penalty are when the act is (1) ordered by the city, (2) compelled through suffering an unavoidable great pain (περιωδύνῳ) or (3) the result of some inevitable and unbearable disgrace (αἰσχύνης). It is possible that the

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After this, Elias introduces Cleombrotus, the epigram of Callimachus and an answering epigram, which he attributes to himself (14.1–13). There follows the discussion of the Stoic justifications of suicide familiar from Olympiodorus 1.6. Elias has the same five cases of justified suicide as Olympiodorus (see table 2). Poverty, which comes fourth in his list, is illustrated by a poem of Theognis giving advice to Cyrnus should he become impoverished (15.16–18). Like Olympiodorus, he uses Menoeceus as his example of one who killed himself due to a great necessity and the Pythagorean woman for the case of one compelled to do shameful things.

Elias then gives the arguments against suicide, referring first to a monograph (μονόβιβλον) of Plotinus that he says is directed against the five Stoic types of justified suicide. The argument reported here is the same as the one at Olympiodorus 1.2 (15.23–16.2). He follows this by citing an alleged Roman legal practice of mutilating the feet of suicides prior to their burial (16.3–7) and closes with a quote from the *Iliad* (24.54) on the treatment of Hector's body by Achilles as an appropriate description of the bodies of suicides (16.3–8).

David's discourse roughly follows the same order as that of Elias. He introduces the definition and attributes it to Plato (29.13–17). He adds a comment on the difference between 'dying' (θνήσκειν) and 'death' (τεθνάναι), noting that dying signifies the practical activity of the mortification of the passions (νέκρωσιν τῶν παθῶν), while death is the theoretical or contemplative state. After having mortified the passions and purified the soul, the philosopher ascends to contemplation and begins to theologize (θεολογεῖν) (29.17–26).

David next turns to the objection that Plato contradicts himself (29.32–30.1) and provides three 'dialectical proofs' (ἐπιχειρήματα)[21] to establish that one must not commit suicide: (1) the philosopher is like god but the suicide is not like god (30.1–8); (2) the analogy with the divine that never separates itself from secondary beings, familiar from Olympiodorus 1.2 and Elias 15.23f (30.8–21); (3) and that because virtue is acquired through philosophy and the person who lives in accordance with virtue does not grieve over bodily misfortunes or external things such as money, then the philosopher has no cause to commit suicide (30.21–30). He then moves to his exposition of Plato's definition, assuring us that Plato's claims do not conflict because Plato distinguishes between natural and chosen death (31.3–26). He presents Cleombrotus and Callimachus' epigram, followed by the same answering epigram, which David alone attributes to Olympiodorus (31.27–32.2),[22] and then provides the revised definition that philosophy is the practice of chosen death that preserves natural life (32.5–9). After this, he treats the Stoics, presenting the analogy between life and a banquet, but his list of the forms of justified suicides is different from the ones given in Olympiodorus and Elias (the differences are represented in table 2). He recounts six cases of reasonable suicides, instead of five, according to the Stoics: (1) poverty (32.18–25); (2) when the body is ill-humoured and unfit to receive the virtues of the soul, followed by the epigram of 'a certain Cynic philosopher' who is half-paralyzed and appeals to the emperor Julian to order him either treated or killed, followed by the supposed response of Julian (32.25–33.5); (3) some special crisis (περίστασις), to which he gives the example of the Pythagorean woman whom he identifies as Theano (though the Armenian version says that she is 'Timikhta, who is also called Theano')[23] (33.8–14); (4) senility (33.14–17); (5) being compelled to do something unlawful such as marrying one's mother or eating something unlawful (33.17–20); and (6) a common crisis such as an enemy siege (33.21–26).

Stoic lists were an elaboration of this passage in the *Laws*. The Stoics may have been especially drawn to this passage because Plato describes suicide as murder of the person who is most familiar (οἰκειότατον) to the murderer, a description that would call to the Stoic mind their doctrine of οἰκείωσις.

[21] For the significance of the term ἐπιχείρημα, see Brisson (n.18) 483.

[22] Or perhaps, if Elias' introduction is based on or transcribed from the lectures of his teacher, Olympiodorus, the first-person reference here is to him rather than Elias.

[23] Kendall and Thomson (n.4) 76–77.

David then gives the account of those who allow only three justifiable situations for suicide: those who are either in the best life or intermediate and see themselves declining into the worst, and those who are in the worst condition and do not see themselves ever improving (33.27–33). This appears to be a distorted and simplified version of the view attributed to Plato in Olympiodorus 1.5. Finally, he asserts that one must never commit suicide whether there is a plausible[24] reason or not (οὔτε εὐλόγως οὔτε ἀλόγως) for it (34.1). Following *Phaedo* 62d, he accuses suicides of setting themselves against the demiurge and threatening his authority (34.2–6). The misfortunes that beset human life, he adds, are not intended to destroy us but to test the soul, in the same way that a ship's pilot is tested in a storm. He ends his discourse by quoting certain Peripatetics who prayed to Zeus to rain difficult circumstances upon them in order to demonstrate the endurance of their souls (34.6–12).[25]

Pseudo-Elias also comments on the distinction between dying and death (14.1) but then proceeds immediately to note that Plato intended the practice of death to be that of chosen, not natural death (14.2). He then brings in the Callimachus epigram (14.4–5). Like David, he says that he presents dialectical proofs (ἐπιχειρημάτων). The first is the textual argument (12.7–9) that since Plato would be contradicting himself if he were talking about natural death, Plato must have been talking about chosen death. The second argument is the argument from human likeness to god, for suicides act like tyrants, which is ungodly (12.9). The third is ascribed to the *Enneads*, and is also based on assimilation to god. It is the argument that just as god's providence extends to all 'secondary beings', the soul provides for and does not abandon the body, which is secondary and inferior (12.10–12). The fourth argument is attributed to Proclus' commentary on Plotinus, and is the argument from philosophy as the source of virtues (12.13–15).

Pseudo-Elias gives Socrates, Anaxarchus and Amphimachus as examples of philosophers who cared only for the soul, not the body or external things (12.17–20). At 12.21 he begins a digression on the topic of life and death. He expounds on the differences between natural and chosen death as well as natural and chosen life (12.22), and then quotes a line that also appears in Elias 13.6 from the *Odyssey* (12.21–22), spoken by Circe of Odysseus' men, who by having gone to Hades and come back will die twice, and notes that, like them, philosophers experience a two-fold death (12.24–25). He adds a passage from the *Odyssey* (24.6) that compares the ghosts of Penelope's suitors to bats, which he takes to illustrate 'the things that bury the soul inside the passions' (τῶν ἐγκαταθαπτόντων τὴν ψυχὴν τοῖς πάθεσι) (12.26). Because their souls were still bound up with their bodies, their death was more violent, and they shrieked in the way that trees that are broken by the force of the wind do, and the way that Patroclus' soul bewailed at his death in the *Iliad* (22.362–63) (12.28). He explains that ghosts remain near graves because they want to be near their bodies (12.29). Then he presents the six conjunctions of being and not-being, and being well and being badly: (1) being and (2) not being, (3) being well and (4) being badly, (5) not-being well and (6) not-being badly (12.30), which produce 15 combinations, of which only five are consistent: (1) being and being well (a virtuous person); (2) being and being badly (a vicious person); (3) being and not-being well (a person who is alive and chooses to live a life of virtue); (4) not-being well and not being (the one who chose a virtuous life and has died accordingly); and (5) not-being badly and not being (the suicide). He states that 'being' is simply being alive, 'not being' is simply being dead, while 'being well' is living in accordance with virtue (corresponding presumably to the state of chosen death, the purified soul) and 'living badly' is living in an inferior way (φαύλως), 'not-being well' is choosing to live a virtuous life (θνήσκειν κατὰ προαίρεσιν or the state of chosen dying, the process of purification) and 'not-being badly' is to become a polluting self-murderer (τὸ φονέα μιάστορά τινα γίνεσθαι ἑαυτοῦ) (12.32–33).

[24] David is presumably using εὐλόγως in the technical sense in Stoic epistemology that contrasts reasonable (εὔλογον) but fallible impressions with the infallible (ἀδιάψευστον) cognitive impression (καταληπτική): see D.L. 7.177.

[25] The Armenian *tegheay*, 'rain', confirms that the proper reading is βρέξον rather than ὄρεξον, 'reach out, give', as A. Busse, the editor of David (n.13), has it.

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There follows a curious digression on death (12.34–38) that the commentator remarks is extraneous (ἔξωθεν) and not from the argument of a philosopher. The digression focuses on the claim that the Pythia at times treats murderers as if they were not murderers, and those who are not murderers as if they were murderers. After this digression comes the explanation of why Cleombrotus erred. The answering epigram is not attributed to any particular philosopher, but rather is something that 'we say' (12.38). The chapter ends with the revised definition of death, according to which philosophy is the practice of death that is consistent with (presumably, natural) life (τοῦ ζῴου συνισταμένου) (12.39).

A new chapter begins with the discussion of the Stoic examples of justified suicide (see table 2). Then Pseudo-Elias turns to the other justification of suicide based on the three forms of life (13.18–20), which corresponds to David 33.27–33. He closes with his rejection of these justifications, pointing out, as does David, that the misfortunes of life test the soul and reveal its virtues. He quotes Hesiod (*Opera et Dies* 289–92) on the immortal gods who 'have placed sweat in front of virtue' and ends by repeating Plato's claim at *Phaedo* 62b that men are in a kind of prison, which he takes to support his rejection of suicide.

	Great necessity (μεγάλην χρείαν)	*Forced by tyrant or enemy*	*Senility*	*Serious illness*	*Poverty*	*Common crisis*	*Special crisis*
Olympiodorus	1.6.26–28 *Menoeceus*	1.6.28–32 *Pyth. woman*	1.6.33–34	1.6.35–36	1.6		
Elias	14.26–30 *Menoeceus*	14.29–15.8 *Pyth. woman*	15.19–21	15.8–15	15.16–18 *Theognis*		
David		33.17–20	33.14–17	32.25–33.5 *Cynic and Julian*	32.18–22 *Theognis*	33.21–26	33.8–14 *Pyth. woman*
Pseudo-Elias			13.12–14	13.6–8 *Cynic and Julian*	13.3–5 *Theognis*	13.15–17	13.9–12 *Pyth. woman*

Table 2. The Stoic justifications of suicide in the Neoplatonic commentaries.

II. The literary and historical examples

While the philosophical arguments are important, a focus on the historical and literary examples invoked in the discourses may be especially pertinent for addressing the question of their pagan or Christian authorship. The examples of suicides and martyrs that appear in at least two of the discourses are Cleombrotus (mentioned in all but Olympiodorus), Menoeceus, the Pythagorean woman and Anaxarchus (Elias and Pseudo-Elias, as well as Olympiodorus in his commentaries on the *Gorgias* and *Alcibiades*). We may add to these examples Theognis' epigram that counsels suicide and Julian's admonition to a Cynic philosopher. Each of these examples will be briefly examined before we turn to a possible common source that may explain their appearances in the discourses.

Cleombrotus

The references to Cleombrotus all involve the epigram of Callimachus, who is presumably the commentators' main source on *Phaedo*-inspired suicide. Callimachus' intent in portraying Cleombrotus' suicide is ambiguous. Is he criticizing Cleombrotus for tragically misinterpreting Plato's

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dialogue and hence providing a cautionary tale against superficial and unsupervised study of philosophy? Or is he exposing the morbid and ruinous character of Platonism itself, with Cleombrotus as an authentic practitioner of that self-destructive philosophy? Related to that question is whether Callimachus takes himself to be writing about the same Cleombrotus mentioned at *Phaedo* 59c. There is also the matter of what in the *Phaedo* provoked Cleombrotus to kill himself. Was it Socrates' characterization of philosophy as the practice of death or, instead, was he profoundly ashamed when Plato made public his unexcused absence at Socrates' death?[26]

Whatever ambiguities there may be in the epigram, they all seem to have been lost on the Neoplatonists, none of whom even intimates that Cleombrotus may have been a disciple of Socrates. Ammonius identifies Cleombrotus as a young man of about 20 (μειράκιον) who 'looked into' (ἐγκύψας) the *Phaedo* and out of ignorance (ἐξ ἀγνοίας) determined that he must practice death literally by throwing himself down from a wall. Ammonius quotes Callimachus' epigram in full without any significant modification.[27] He gives no indication that Cleombrotus had any contact with Plato or Socrates other than through casual reading of the dialogue. Given that the *Phaedo* would have been written many years after Socrates' death, Cleombrotus' youth would presumably rule out his identification with his namesake in the dialogue as far as Ammonius was concerned. Indeed, Ammonius appears to be trying to rule out any connection with Socrates by emphasizing twice that Cleombrotus was a juvenile and thus both too young to be among Socrates' disciples and also too immature and ignorant to understand the true meaning of the practice of death.

This epigram answering Callimachus appears in Elias, David and Pseudo-Elias:[28]

εἰ μὴ γράμμα Πλάτωνος ἐμὴν ἐπέδησεν ἐρωήν,
ἤδη λυγρὸν ἔλυσα βίου πολυκηδέα δεσμόν.
If Plato's book had not bound my impulse,
in misery[29] I would have already dissolved the chain of life.[30]

Elias' account notes that Cleombrotus 'studied carefully the passage in the *Phaedo*' (περινοήσας τὸ ἐν Φαίδωνι ῥητὸν) (14.2) and wishes that Cleombrotus had learned the difference between natural and chosen death. He uses Cleombrotus as a transition to his discussion of the Stoics, referring to them as 'Cleombroti' who accept philosophy as the practice of natural death.

Pseudo-Elias also introduces Cleombrotus at the beginning of his discourse on suicide. He tells of 'a certain Cleombrotus of Ambracia' who happened to read Plato's dialogue and took Plato to be referring to natural death (12.4–5). Cleombrotus' fault was his failure to pay attention correctly to the words of the dialogue. Pseudo-Elias returns to Cleombrotus in the discourse, quoting *Phaedo* 62b3–5 again for good measure followed by the epigram that David attributes to Olympiodorus. To prevent the existence of more Cleombroti, he advises defining philosophy as the practice of death 'that is consistent with life' (τοῦ ζῴου συνισταμένου) (12.39).

David reserves his introduction to Cleombrotus until the end of the chapter in which he defends Plato against the charge that he violates the demiurge's wish by undoing the bond between the soul and body that the demiurge fastened (29.28–30). His defence is the standard distinction

[26] All these questions are rehearsed in detail in G.D. Williams, 'Cleombrotus of Ambracia: interpretations of a suicide from Callimachus to Agathias', *CQ* ns 45 (1995) 154–69.

[27] 4.18–28. Ammonius has Ἀμβρακιώτης in place of Callimachus' Ὠμβρακιώτης.

[28] The epigram appears in E. Cougny, *Epigrammatum Anthologia Palatina cum Planudeis et appendice nova epigrammatum veterum ex libris et marmoribus ductorum* 3 (Paris 1890) 320.

[29] Cougny (n.28) 375 suggests reading λυγρός instead of λυγρόν, since otherwise there would be two unconnected adjectives modifying δέσμον (as G.D. Williams (n.26) 163 n. 44, who tentatively endorses Cougny's suggestion, notes). But the Armenian manuscripts render λυγρόν as the adverb *tazhanabar* ('in weariness or distress'). The Armenian translator must have read the accusative and taken it to be the adverbial accusative of manner.

[30] *Cf.* Pseudo-Elias 12.38.

between natural and chosen death. He introduces Cleombrotus at 31.27 and quotes the epigram of Callimachus, followed by the epigram of Olympiodorus. Like Pseudo-Elias, he advocates an addition to the definition of philosophy to prevent further instances of Cleombroti, but offers a definition worded differently from his: 'philosophy is the practice of death that preserves life' (μελέτη θανάτου τοῦ ζῴου σωζομένου) (32.7).

Menoeceus

Menoeceus, son of the Theban king Creon, killed himself in order to ensure victory for Thebes. Apollodorus (*Bibliotheca* 3.6.7.5) notes that Tiresias counselled the Thebans prior to the battle with the Argives, and said that Thebes would be victorious if Menoeceus would offer himself as a sacrifice to Ares, which he subsequently did before the gates of the city. This is consistent with the portrayal by Euripides (*Phoenician Women* 930–46), in which Tiresias prophesies that one of Creon's sons must offer himself as a sacrifice to Ares to gain the god's alliance by atoning for Cadmus' slaying of the earth-born snake. Since Haemon, the other son of Creon, is married in Euripides' account, the responsibility falls to Menoeceus. Pausanius (9.25.1) notes that the grave of Menoeceus is located near the Neistan (Νηιστῶν) gate at Thebes and that he willingly killed himself in accordance with the Delphic Oracle, when Polynices and his army arrived from Argos. Menoeceus is also listed by Cicero (*Tusculan Disputations* 1.48.116) as one example of those celebrated by orators for dying for their country. Epictetus (*Discources* 3.20.5) uses Menoeceus as an example of a man who benefitted by dying, and thus died well by sacrificing his life.

Menoeceus is mentioned in Olympiodorus' presentation of the five Stoic justifications for suicide. By analogy with a banquet that has been broken up due to some 'great obligation' (μεγάλην χρείαν), so too may one end one's life on account of some duty, as Menoeceus did when he sacrificed himself for his country (1.8 iv). Elias has essentially the same wording, giving the general example of the Pythia ordering someone to cut his throat on behalf of his city when destruction is upon it, and then adding 'just as when Menoeceus did when he sacrificed himself on behalf of his country and saved it' (14.26–29). Neither David nor Pseudo-Elias mentions Menoeceus, though one may suppose that he would have served well as an example of the common crisis justification.

The Pythagorean woman (Theano or Timycha)

Iamblichus (*de vita Pythagorica* 31.189–94) recounts the story of Myllias and Timycha. When Dionysius II of Syracuse was unable to obtain the friendship of any of the Pythagoreans, he sent 30 soldiers under Eurymenes to stop their customary migration from Tarentum to Metapontum. The soldiers, pretending to be robbers, ambushed the Pythagoreans in Phalae in Tarentum and caused the ten Pythagoreans making the journey to flee. The soldiers would have abandoned their pursuit had the Pythagoreans not ended up in a field of beans, which their teachings did not allow them to touch. Unable to move, they threw sticks and stones at the soldiers, injuring many of them, but, being overpowered, they were killed, since they were unwilling to be taken captive. Returning with disappointment to Syracuse because they were not able to capture any Pythagoreans, the soldiers encountered two other Pythagoreans, Myllias of Croton and his wife, Timycha the Lacedaemonian, who was pregnant and thus walked slowly. They were captured by the soldiers and brought back to Dionysius, who offered them all honours if they agreed to rule with him. The offer was refused, so Dionysius promised to let them go as long as they explained why their fellow Pythagoreans preferred death to walking on beans. Myllias replied that he would rather walk on beans than explain why Pythagoreans refuse to walk on beans. Dionysius ordered him removed, and commanded Timycha to be tortured, thinking that, as a pregnant woman deprived of her husband, she would quickly capitulate to his demand. She, however, bit off her tongue and spat it at Dionysius.

Olympiodorus (6.28–32) uses the Pythagorean woman as his example of the second of the Stoic justifications of suicide – on account of foul language or abuse (αἰσχροῤῥημοσύνη)[31] – which allows suicide when a tyrant forces one to reveal secrets (ἀπόῤῥητα). The account in Olympiodorus, in addition to omitting the names of the Pythagorean and the tyrant, also leaves out her husband and attributes a response similar to Myllias' to her. When asked by the tyrant, she first responds that she would rather eat than tell, but then when compelled to eat beans, responds that she would rather tell than eat, and then bit off her tongue, the organ of both speech and taste (διαλεκτικὸν καὶ γευστικὸν ὄργανον).

Elias 14.29–30 likewise employs the unnamed 'little Pythagorean woman' (Πυθαγόρειον γύναιον)[32] as an illustration of the Stoic justification of suicide, on account of tyrants who 'burst in like disorderly revellers (ἐπεισκωμάζοντας) and force us either to do something shameful or reveal secrets (λέγειν τὰ ἀπόῤῥητα)'. Pseudo-Elias includes the Pythagorean woman, whom, he says, some call Μοιχανώ[33] and others Θεανώ,[34] to illustrate the Stoic justification on account of some 'special or individual crisis' (περίστασιν ἰδικὴν) that occurs, rather than abuse by a tyrant. There is a lacuna after her first response ('I would rather eat than say'), but it is clear that it should be filled with the second response after being compelled to eat. The text starts up again by noting that 'confounding (παραλογιζομένη) the ones compelling her, she cut out her tongue and killed herself'.

David 33.10 agrees with Pseudo-Elias in using this story as an example of a special crisis rather than tyrannical abuse. In the Greek manuscripts, the woman is identified as Theano, but the Armenian manuscripts state that the Pythagorean woman was named *Timikʿtay*, and that she was also called Theano (*Tʿēanov*).[35] *Timikʿtay* must be a corrupted form of Τιμυχά, the name given in Iamblichus. The inclusion of the Iamblichean name of the Pythagorean woman is significant since none of the extant Greek discourses that talk of the Pythagorean woman identify her with a name close to the one she has in Iamblichus, which is most likely the ultimate source of this story. One cannot rule out that the Armenian translator had Iamblichus available before him to use to amend the Greek text.[36] It is also possible, and in line with Valentina Calzolari's thesis,[37] that the Armenian is based on an earlier Greek manuscript that may have contained the original name.

Anaxarchus

Diogenes Laertius (9.58–60) notes that Anaxarchus of Abdera was a student of Diogenes of Smyrna and, according to some, belonged to a succession of scholars that led back to Democritus. The account of his enmity with Nicocreon, tyrant of Cyprus, first appears in Philo *Quod omnis probus liber sit* 106, where he is paired with Zeno of Elea, both of whom faced the torture of tyrants with

[31] It is odd that Olympiodorus alone of the commentators focuses on abusive language as the justification of suicide, as if being compelled to reveal secrets by a tyrant who does not use abusive language would not justify suicide.

[32] γύναιον is often a term of derision signifying a weak or silly woman.

[33] Manuscript V (*Vaticanus gr.* 1470, an 11th- or 12th-century manuscript) of David has τῆ μοιχόη qualifying γυνή. A correction in V written in another hand that Busse takes to be often reliable and to be drawing from the same exemplar as V replaces this with ἡ μοιχεία, indicating that the account in Pseudo-Elias takes as a name what is instead an epithet, 'adulteress', applied to the Pythagorean. The epithet is lacking in the other David manuscripts and in the Armenian version: see David (n.13) viii.

[34] Theano is the name of Pythagoras' wife according to some accounts: see D.L. 8.42; Iamb. *VP* 28.146, 36.263.

[35] *ov* is the standard Armenian transliteration of the omega: see Kendall and Thomson (n.4) 76–77.

[36] See L. Ter Petrosian, *Ancient Armenian Translations* (New York 1992), who notes that the philosophical commentaries of Iamblichus were translated during a supposed second period of the 'Hellenizing school' (a putative school of Armenian translators of Greek texts active from the fifth to the eighth century).

[37] See Calzolari (n.4) 59. Calzolari presents evidence indicating that while the Armenian text is derived from the V family of manuscripts, V is not the oldest of the family and the Armenian translation was made from the manuscript underlying V.

an indifference toward their bodies and physical suffering. In response to his torture, being pounded in a mortar, he said 'Pound Anaxarchus' skin (ἀσκόν). Anaxarchus you cannot pound' (109). Diogenes fills out the context. Forced to travel to Cyprus, Anaxarchus was arrested by Nicocreon, who had him thrown into a mortar and beaten with iron pestles. Nicocreon also ordered him to cut out his tongue, which he spat out at the king (as Zeno also did to his tormentor in the accounts in Philo and Diogenes). In Diogenes, Anaxarchus uses θύλακος, 'sack' or 'pouch', rather than ἀσκόν, to refer to his body.

Anaxarchus is mentioned by name in Olympiodorus' commentary on Plato's *Gorgias* (170.20–22): 'Anaxarchus, too, was saying the same thing, "Grind down, grind down Anaxarchus' pouch, because you are never going to grind down Anaxarchus himself"'; and there is a passing allusion without mention of his name in Olympiodorus' commentary on Plato's *Alcibiades* (105.5).[38]

Anaxarchus appears in Pseudo-Elias 12.18–20 in the discussion of a dialectical argument against suicide from Proclus' commentary on the *Enneads*. The argument here is that because virtue is sufficient for happiness and happiness does not flee in the face of fearful things, philosophy, which is a collection of virtues and thus possesses happiness, stands firm in the face of fearful things, even if the virtuous man falls into the fortunes of Priam. Elias 22.25–26 refers to Anaxarchus in the discussion of Aristotle's definition of philosophy as the art of arts and the science of sciences. In explaining why Aristotle says philosophy is the art of arts, Elias gives as his fourth reason that it corrects the errors of the other arts. Rhetoric teaches that the profitable and the just are different, but philosophy corrects this error by showing that what is just is also profitable since what matters is only what is useful to the soul, not the body. Elias uses the story of Anaxarchus to show that by justly resisting Nicocreon, Anaxarchus still profited even though his body was tortured and destroyed.

Anaxarchus is not presented as an example of a suicide, but as a philosopher, who through the virtue he gained from philosophy was able to distance his soul from his body and to disdain the body as something insignificant or expendable. The ideal philosopher, like Anaxarchus, according to the Neoplatonists, will not consider bodily afflictions and suffering to be serious enough to warrant suicide. The inference is dubious. For if the body is truly so unimportant, would one not be just as easily moved to destroy it due to its ability to distract? For Proclus and Pseudo-Elias, in any event, Anaxarchus is in the mould of Socrates, who refuses to end his life except due to some compulsion. Both may be ranked as philosophical martyrs (in the broad sense of persons who are killed for their convictions) who are so far from being suicides that they would never accept the Stoic argument that one may kill oneself as a result of an ailing and unfit body.

Theognis

Elias 15.21–22, David 32.21–22 and Pseudo-Elias 13.4 contain verses adapted from Theognis 175–76 to illustrate the Stoic justification of suicide on account of poverty:

> χρὴ πενίην φεύγοντα καὶ ἐς μεγακήτεα πόντον
> ῥιπτεῖν καὶ πετρῶν, Κύρνε, κατ᾽ἠλιβάτων.
> It is necessary to flee poverty by throwing oneself into
> mighty hollows and down from high rocks, O Cyrnus.

Both Pseudo-Elias and David interpret the advice to Cyrnus not as a call to commit suicide but to do everything one can to avoid hunger and starvation. Elias does not provide an alternative, non-literal interpretation, but notes at 15.20 only that Theognis speaks well (καλῶς).

[38] L.G. Westerink, *Olympiodori in Platonis Gorgiam Commentaria* (Leipzig 1970); *Commentary on the First Alcibiades of Plato* (Amsterdam 1982).

The epigram of Julian

David 33.1 and Pseudo-Elias 13.7–8 both contain adaptations of a curious epigram from *Anthologia graeca* 9.137. The epigram in the anthology is attributed to a certain 'half-paralyzed' or 'half-withered' (ἡμίξηρος) grammarian who appeals to the emperor Hadrian:

> Ἥμισύ μου τέθνηκε, τὸ δ᾽ ἥμισυ λιμὸς ἐλέγχει·
> σῶσόν μου, βασιλεῦ, μουσικὸν ἡμίτομον.
> Half of me has died, and hunger gets the better of my other half;
> Save, O king, a musical semitone of me.

The emperor replies with his own epigram:

> Ἀμφοτέρους ἀδικεῖς, καὶ Πλουτέα καὶ Φαέθοντα·
> τὸν μὲν ἔτ᾽ εἰσορόων, τοῦ δ᾽ ἀπολειπόμενος.
> You wrong both Pluto and Phaethon,
> looking still at the one, and abandoning the other.

Pseudo-Elias and David replace Hadrian with Julian, and the grammarian with a Cynic philosopher. Pseudo-Elias 13.7 uses the epigrams as illustrations of the Stoic justification of suicide in case of an ailing and unfit body. The epigram of the Cynic philosopher is worded somewhat differently:

> Half of me has died, and hunger hinders (ἐρύκει) my other half;
> Have pity (οἴκτειρον), O king, on a Cynic cut in half (Κυνικὸν ἡμίτομον).

The epigram of the emperor remains the same as in the anthology, except now it is attributed to Julian 'the transgressor' (τὸν παραβάτην), which, assuming that this is not a scribal insertion, is a small but significant indicator of the Christian authorship of the Pseudo-Elias commentary.[39] David presents another modification of the same epigram as an example of a situation where the body is ill-humored (κακόχυμα) and thus unfit to receive the virtues of the soul (ψυχικὰς ἀρετὰς) (32.29). It was for this reason, David informs us, that a certain Cynic philosopher came to Julian the king (he does not add 'the transgressor' or any other epithet):

> One half of me died, and dawn looks on my other half (δέρκεται ἠώς);
> Have pity, O king, on a Cynic cut in half (ἡμίτομον).

David explains that the Cynic is requesting that he either be treated or killed. Julian's response is essentially the same as the one given in Pseudo-Elias with just a variant of Pluto's name (Πλούτωνα instead of Πλουτέα). The Armenian version of the epigram is also somewhat different from the Greek, with the word for daylight or dawn in the accusative rather than nominative:

> Half of my body has died and the other half sees daylight (*tesanē ztiw*);
> Have mercy, O king, on this Cynic cut in half.

The Armenian word used for ἡμιξήρος, *kisagōs* ('half-withered, half-paralyzed'), supports Juan Gil and Sofía Torallas Tovar's contention that ξήρος is being used in the sense of *siccus* in late Latin.[40]

[39] Westerink (n.11) xii–xiii lists this as well as several passages in Pseudo-Elias that appear to be biblical allusions to support Christian authorship. Many of these alleged allusions are dubious. An examination of the linguistic evidence that Westerink presents would be a worthy project but lies outside the scope of this paper.

[40] See J. Gil and S. Torallas Tovar, *Hadrianus* (Barcelona 2010) 100–01 n.67.

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The role of this epigram in the discourses is obscure. The emperor appears to criticize the piteous paralytic for his ambivalence over whether he should die, but one can also see it as the emperor firmly counselling suicide in this circumstance. As such, the Neoplatonists' replacement of Hadrian with Julian is significant. The opposition of David and Pseudo-Elias to suicide in such cases is plainly at odds with the emperor's advice and serves to dissociate the Neoplatonists from Julian. One can understand why the later Neoplatonists would be eager to distance themselves from Julian, who himself had Neoplatonic teachers, and in particular they would want to establish that Julian's counselling of suicide would not have had the support of Plato.[41]

III. Gregory of Nazianzus' First Invective against Julian

Sensitivity about Julian among the Neoplatonist commentators is understandable given the depth of Christian hostility toward the apostate emperor. A prime example of Christian sentiment is found in Gregory of Nazianzus' invectives against Julian. Among the charges that Gregory levels against Julian is that Julian praised pagans who sacrificed their lives while mocking Christian martyrs. Gregory contrasts the Christian martyrs with the sacrificial victims and suicides of the pagans, castigating Julian for respecting the latter but having no respect for the former. The Christian martyrs died for Truth, while the pagans died for trivial or abominable reasons or worldly glory (as in the case of death for Thebes or in the Trojan War). Gregory also accuses Julian of inconsistency. A philosopher should recognize the virtues of even his enemies. But Gregory (*PG* 35.589–92) asserts that Julian condemned Christians who sacrificed their lives for their faith but admired pagans who killed themselves:

> Did you have no respect for the victims slain for Christ's sake? ... All these marvels you did not respect, but condemned, you who admired … the sacrifice of the royal daughter at Troy, and the blood of Menoeceus on behalf of Thebes, and later of the daughters of Skedasos in Leuktra. The one who approves the Spartan young men being flogged with whips, and the blood on the altar delighting the pure and virgin goddess, and exalting the hemlock of Socrates, and the leg of Epictetus, and the sack (θύλακον) of Anaxarchus, men whose philosophy is a necessity rather than voluntary. And Cleombrotus of Ambracia's leap, made philosophical by the work On the Soul. And the strictness of the Pythagoreans concerning beans, and Theano's (Θεανοῦς) contempt of death, or of someone or other of those initiated in or studying his philosophy.

It is remarkable that most of the examples of pagan suicides and martyrs (Cleombrotus, Menoeceus, Anaxarchus and the Pythagorean woman, identified mistakenly here as Theano) in Gregory's litany are also used as examples in the discourses on suicide. The textual evidence points tentatively to a possible dependence of the discourses on his invective.[42] For example, Gregory appears to

[41] The other change in the versions of the epigram in David and Pseudo-Elias is the replacement of the grammarian with a Cynic. The reason for the choice of a Cynic is mysterious, but may be explained by the close relation of Cynicism and Stoicism, whose founder, Zeno, studied with the Cynic Crates (D.L. 7.2). The choice begins to make more sense given that it occurs in the context of a discussion of the Stoic position on suicide. The account may also recall the Cynic practice of παρρησία or speaking frankly even in the presence of powerful men and emperors (*cf.* D.L. 6.69).

[42] Evidence that Christians in the sixth century, especially in the East, were reading Gregory's invective is supplied by the existence of Greek scholia by Pseudo-Nonnus on the invective, as well as extant translations of these scholia in Syriac and Armenian. Pseudo-Nonnus was most likely an eastern Mediterranean Christian who produced writings in the early sixth century: see J. Nimmo Smith (ed.), *Pseudo-Nonniani in IV Orationes Gregorii Nazianzeni Commentarii* (Turnhout 1992). Whether the scholia were produced as an aid to students who read Gregory's sermons as part of their secondary school education (see N.G. Wilson 'The Church and classical studies in Byzantium', *Antike und Abendland* 16 (1970) 70; *Scholars of Byzantium* (London 1983) 23, both cited by Nimmo Smith (above) 8 n.25) or, as Nimmo Smith suggests, that Pseudo-Nonnus wrote down for personal reasons his memories of his early schooling, the point stands that Gregory's sermons, particularly the invectives, were part of the standard school curriculum of the sixth century. For the Syriac version, see S. Brock, *The Syriac Version of the Pseudo-Nonnus Mythological Scholia* (Cambridge 1971).

identify the martyred Pythagorean woman with Theano, the name found in David and Pseudo-Elias, rather than with Timycha. Also revealing is the use of θύλακον, used by Elias and Pseudo-Elias, rather than ἀσκόν in the reference to Anaxarchus. Of the two examples of those who seem to counsel suicide in the discourses, Julian and Theognis, the former is the target of his invective. Theognis does not appear in the invective, but he is dealt with elsewhere in Gregory's corpus, specifically in *Carmina* 1.2.10.393.5, where he criticizes Theognis' advice on poverty:[43]

> Ληρεῖ δέ μοι Θέογνις ὡς λῆρον πλατύν,
> κρημνοὺς προτιμῶν τῆς ἀπορίας καὶ βυθούς,
> κακῶς τε Κύρνῳ νομοθετῶν εἰς χρήματα.
> Theognis seems to me to speak sheer folly,
> preferring cliffs and sea depths to difficulty,
> and legislating poorly to Cyrnus in matters of money.

The presence of these references in Gregory suggests that the Neoplatonists were responding to a specific Christian accusation that pagan philosophy and, in particular, Platonic philosophy encouraged suicide for frivolous causes. One can understand why the commentators would want to dispel this view from the minds of their predominantly Christian students.[44] The rejection of suicide as a justified act need not be a sign of the Christian affiliation of the commentators so much as a defensive posture of beleaguered professors facing a growing and powerful Christian movement suspicious of their moral teachings. Non-Christian Neoplatonists, including Plotinus, Porphyry and Ammonius took strong positions against suicide.[45] It is just as likely as not that the authors were pagans defending Platonic philosophy from the charge of encouraging suicide. Olympiodorus' more permissive stance toward suicide is a Stoicizing anomaly within Neoplatonism, and David's absolute prohibition can plausibly be taken not as a dissenting position due to a supposed Christian commitment but rather a return to a more traditional Neoplatonic opposition to suicide perhaps amplified by external pressure from Christian authorities and students. The intramural debate on suicide in Neoplatonism must have been influenced by attacks coming from Christians who viewed paganism and Platonism in particular as promoting suicide. The discourses on suicide may have been aimed principally at rebutting those Christian criticisms by trying to show that Platonic philosophy, properly understood, does not encourage suicide, and that those pagan philosophers who allow suicide either are poor interpreters of Plato (like Cleombrotus) or are Stoics who base their easily refuted arguments on a questionable and shallow analogy between life and a drinking party. Genuine Platonic philosophers come to the same conclusion as the Christians who oppose the attempts to justify acts of suicide.[46] As such, the discourses on suicide that rule out any form of rational suicide are not specifically Christian or pagan, but rather represent efforts to rebut the Christian criticisms that would have been familiar to the Christian students attending the lectures. One can imagine them being delivered by either pagan or Christian professors. Accordingly, we may conclude that Wildberg's thesis should withstand any objection based on late Neoplatonic views on suicide.

[43] For another patristic reference to Theognis, see Clement *Stromata* 4.5, who criticizes Theognis for presuming poverty to be intrinsically evil.

[44] For the prevalence of Christian students in the schools at this time, see Wildberg (n.3) 45, 51, n.84.

[45] For Plotinus, see J. Dillon, 'Singing without an instrument: Plotinus on suicide', *ICS* 19 (1994) 231–38. Dillon argues (*contra* J. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge 1967) 174–77, who maintains that Plotinus always rejected suicide) that the early Plotinus took an absolute stance against suicide but moderated his views as he developed his thoughts on the impassibility of the soul. For Porphyry, see Gertz (n.14) 33. These examples should suffice to demonstrate that a philosopher's support of a strict rejection of suicide is not by itself peculiar to Christians.

[46] Indeed, the reading of *Phd.* 62b as a condemnation of suicide because it defies god's plan in chaining the soul to the body aligns the Neoplatonists' arguments against suicide with Augustine *De civitate Dei* 1.26 where the prohibition of suicide is based on divine command.