

The Grammar of Life: The Areopagus Speech and Pagan Tradition*

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This article explores the interconnection between intellection and life in ancient theology and philosophy by means of a reexamination of Paul's famous Areopagus discourse. Instead of reading the speech as an attempt at theological rapprochement, this essay interprets the speech as a place where fundamentally different grammars for the whole of life come into conflict.

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There are many who well understand how to view the particular, but who at the same time are unable to keep the totality *in mente*. Every such view, although otherwise meritorious, can only bring about confusion.

—Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*

1. Introduction

The Areopagus speech in ch. 17 of the Acts of the Apostles is without a doubt one of the most striking scenes in the entire narrative.¹ It is not, as Philipp Vielhauer, Paul Schubert, and others have thought, the apogée of Acts, but the passage has played a particularly important role in the history of theology and biblical interpretation.²

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1 Thus is the secondary literature on this passage almost endless. Of modern commentators on Acts, Gerhard Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (2 vols.; Freiburg: Herder, 1980/1982) 2.234, offers the most helpful delineation of the main lines of scholarship. Though of course more has been written since the publication of Schneider's second volume, his brief outline remains a trustworthy guide to the intellectual map of past interpretation. Émile Beurlier, 'Saint Paul et L'Aréopage', *Rev. d'hist. et de litt. rel.* 1 (1896) 344–66, is concise for the patristic period.

2 That a scholar as observant as Jacob Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998) 453, can call the Areopagus speech an 'Intermezzo' should immediately

As early as the second century, Christian exegetes were keen to draw attention to the allusions to the texts, critical thought, and common practice of the Graeco-Roman world in Paul's speech as a way to develop an account of the pagan knowledge of God.³ In establishing the connections between Jesus and Socrates—and thus between Christian revelation and pagan theological knowledge—Justin Martyr, for example, drew attention to the fact that Socrates above all others had encouraged the Athenians to come to know 'the unknown God'.⁴ And shortly thereafter, that connoisseur and critic of all intellectual finery, Clement of Alexandria, read Paul's use of the *Phaenomena* of Aratus as precedent for his own argument that pagan philosophy had indeed attained to truth in serious theological matters.⁵ Further on, in the Latin west, Ambrose of Milan cited 17.27–28 as evidence of all humanity's participation in God and the capacity of reason that followed therefrom: grounded as it is in God's own supreme rationality, argued Ambrose, our corresponding rational nature predisposes and enables us all to seek God.⁶ Thomas Aquinas would later agree. In the very first question of his *Summa*, Aquinas states that 'holy teaching uses the authority of

caution against any overstatement of the scene's narrative importance. See Philipp Vielhauer, 'On the "Paulinism" of Acts', *Studies in Luke-Acts* (ed. L. E. Keck and J. L. Martyn; Mifflintown, PA: Sigler, 1999) 33–50, esp. 34; and Paul Schubert, 'The Place of the Areopagus Speech in the Composition of Acts', *Transitions in Biblical Scholarship* (ed. J. Coert Rylaarsdam; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1968) 235–61, esp. 261.

- 3 Examples of pagan tradition that were evident to early Christians are too numerous to name. We shall mention only one particularly striking example known to Acts commentators for a long time: for Origen the echoes of Socrates's trial reverberated so loud through the scene in Athens that he believed Socrates himself to have been tried before the Areopagus. Of course, Socrates was not tried before the Areopagus but before the People's Court in the agora. The fact that Origen thought the council was the Areopagus simply shows the power of Luke's story to evoke analogically shaped 'historical' connections.
- 4 II. *Apol.* 10.6 (πρὸς θεοῦ δὲ τοῦ ἀγνώστου αὐτοῖς διὰ λογοῦ ζητήσεως ἐπίγνωσιν προὔτρεπετο εἰπὼν...). I use here the critical edition of Miroslav Marcovich, *Iustini Martyris Apologiae Pro Christianis* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1994). Marcovich also notes the possible allusion to Acts 17.23 (p. 28). There remains serious debate on the issue of Justin's knowledge of Acts (or lack thereof). For a judicious discussion, see Andrew Gregory, *The Reception of Luke and Acts in the Period before Irenaeus* (WUNT 2/169; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) 317–21.
- 5 *Stromata* I.19. The *Phaenomena* of Aratus was a wildly popular book by ancient standards. It was translated into Latin by no less a man than Cicero himself and also—in a very unusual move at that time—translated into Arabic.
- 6 *Letters to Priests*, 49 (to Horotantius). For the Greek east, see Jaroslav Pelikan's excellent treatment of the Cappadocians in *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1993). Though it is sometimes implicit, throughout the book Pelikan relates the Cappadocians' theological self-understanding and methods to Paul's speech (see esp., for example, p. 167, where Acts 17.22–28 is cited as the overall framework for Part II of Pelikan's book).

philosophers who have been able to perceive the truth by natural reasoning, for instance when St Paul quotes the saying of Aratus'.⁷ Later interpreters such as John Calvin perhaps focused more on Paul's 'apologetic' strategy—his attempt to establish common ground with the Athenians as a way to convince them of the superior truth of the Christian Gospel—but the underlying premise was basically the same as it was in the preceding exegesis: pagans may not yet have attained to fullness of Christian knowledge, but inasmuch as Aratus *et al.* testified to the truth, they were doubtless on the way.⁸

With few exceptions,⁹ modern NT scholars have for the most part simply reproduced the earlier readings, albeit with less overt philosophical analysis and a closer focus upon Luke's own role in shaping Paul's speech.¹⁰ Indeed, it has long been a scholarly commonplace in the modern period to contrast Paul's rejection of natural theology in Romans 1 with Acts 17 as a way to differentiate Paul's own theology from Luke's supposedly rather unpauline formulations.¹¹ Even where the contrast with Paul would not be drawn so sharply, the reading of Luke's material theological position has been, by and large, the same.¹² Major commentators—Conzelmann, Johnson, Fitzmyer, etc.—and

7 *Summa Theologiae* Ia.1.8.2. I am aware of the debate over how best to construe Aquinas's understanding of 'natural knowledge' (i.e., it is not an alternative to theological knowledge). But such matters cannot occupy us here.

8 See Calvin's *Commentary on Acts*, esp. his remarks on 17.22–34. That the Areopagus text was important to Calvin's thinking about the knowledge of God may be seen easily enough in the first chapter of Book I of the *Institutes* (I.1.1, I.5.3, etc.). Reflection on the 'apologetic' dimension of Paul's speech occurred in the earlier period, too, of course. Indeed, for the view that Athenagoras's distinction between arguments 'on behalf of the truth' and 'concerning the truth' owes its intellectual foundations to Paul's Areopagus discourse, see T. F. Torrance, 'Phusikos kai Theologikos Logos, St Paul and Athenagoras at Athens', *SJT* 41 (1988) 11–26. As far as I can discern, Athenagoras does not actually cite Acts 17, but Torrance may well be correct that the structure of his thought—at least as Torrance himself presents it—reflects a careful consideration of Paul's speech. For the connection between Paul's speech and the early Apologists, see the concise article of H. Gebhardt, 'Die an die Heiden gerichtete Missionsrede der Apostel und das Johannesevangelium', *ZNW* 6 (1905) 236–49.

9 See, e.g., C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1994/1998), 2.850–1.

10 Analyzing the speeches in Acts has long been a kind of cottage industry in NT studies. Of course there has also been some debate over the question of cultural influence on Paul's speech, with Dibelius far on one side (pagan) and Gärtner on the other (Jewish). But most NT scholars would now view such Hellenistic/Jewish dichotomies as unnecessary, particularly when dealing with a culturally complex figure such as Luke. Furthermore, attention to the animating narrative moves of Acts as a whole precludes the ability to abstract 'pagan' from 'Jewish' elements when thinking about the Areopagus discourse: Acts is plainly concerned with both aspects of Mediterranean life and weaves them inseparably into the fabric of the text.

11 Vielhauer's article cited in n. 2 above is of course the classic statement of this position.

12 E.g., F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954) 345–68; or Rudolf Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (2 vols.; Neukirchener-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1986) 2.141–2.

other astute readers of Acts have all taken the Areopagus speech to argue for a deep theological *Anknüpfungspunkt* between pagan philosophical thinking and Paul's proclamation. Common vocabulary—the citation and allusions to pagan tradition—entails theological commensurability.¹³

What is remarkable about this long history of reading Acts 17 is that it constitutes a relatively stable and coherent hermeneutical tradition in spite of all the manifest differences in time, geographical location, historical analysis, argumentative focus, philosophical commitments, philological skill, felicity in expression, and so forth. When all is said and done, the Areopagus speech still emerges clearly as a kind of *locus classicus* for 'natural theology'.¹⁴ To be sure, there remain substantive differences between, on the one hand, those who would make a distinction between analytical judgments that are cognitively correct *in se* (e.g., Acts 17.28) and the actual theological awareness of the speakers of those judgments (the 'poets'),¹⁵ and, on the other, those who would see no need to differentiate, for example, the epistemic status of Aratus's theological understanding of humanity's origins from a Jewish or Christian self-understanding (e.g., from the ancient world, Aristobulus; see below). Still, with more or less precision, the vast majority of Acts' interpreters take the presupposition of Luke's argument in ch. 17 to be that human beings as such—irrespective of the kind of knowledge marked by the names Israel and the church—know the one true God from the world he made and/or an introspectively generated awareness of his presence and/or philosophical anthropology.¹⁶ It may be that such knowledge

13 E.g., Paul Walaskay, *Acts* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998) 166: Paul is 'far removed from the world of the Bible'; his 'address was a reflection on Stoic theology'; Stephen G. Wilson, *The Gentiles and the Gentile Mission in Luke-Acts* (SNTSMS 23; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1973) 214: Luke thinks the Gentiles' 'basic response [is] correct but misguided'.

14 See, e.g., the brief remarks of Daniel Marguerat, 'Paul après Paul: une histoire de réception', *NTS* 54 (2008) 317–37 (319). There were exceptions in the ancient world, too, of course. John Chrysostom, for example, took the logic of Paul's speech to be entirely critical rather than an attempt to establish common ground or engage in Christian apologetics (*Homilies on Acts*, Homily 38).

15 In more traditional language, this is the difference between the order of being and the order of knowledge.

16 See James Barr's chapter on the speech in *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1994). In a sense Barr is right, of course, that the 'importance of the Areopagus speech for traditional natural theology is too obvious to require exemplification' (21 n. 1). Yet it is helpful nevertheless to see something of the cumulative hermeneutical weight of a particular way of reading the speech. Paul's speech is not without its importance in other spheres of argumentation: we might remember, for example, Milton's *Areopagitica* (pub. 1644), whose allusive title recalled not only Isocrates's discourse but also Paul's. It was, says Milton, 'especially Paul' who saw no contradiction in the attempt to insert the wisdom of the Greek poets into holy scripture. Milton's larger point was about censorship, and his actual political position was more dissimilar than similar to that of Isocrates (Milton obviously

is in need of supplementation or even correction, but true knowledge of the true God it nevertheless remains.¹⁷ Perhaps Clement said it best: ‘it is evident’, wrote Clement, ‘that by employing poetic examples from the *Phaenomena* of Aratus, [Paul] approves of the well-spoken words of the Greeks and discloses that through the “unknown God” the Creator God [τὸν δημιουργὸν θεόν] was in a roundabout way honored by the Greeks’ (*Stromata*, 1.19).¹⁸

Given the power and longevity of this way of thinking, it is really no less remarkable that this is not what Acts 17 actually argues. Indeed, whatever the merits of larger theories about a philosophically or experientially based natural theology, they cannot be earned on the basis of a close reading of Acts 17. Paul’s Areopagus speech is not a paean of the Greek intellectual or spiritual achievement. It is instead the presentation of an alternative pattern of life.

The remainder of this essay shall be devoted to a rereading of Acts 17 on the assumption that this long interpretive history has by and large worked within a restricted ambit of thought and, therefore, contributed fundamentally to the occlusion of the exegetical vision needed to grasp the pattern of Lukan reasoning in this passage. After establishing the necessary exegetical basis on which to reflect hermeneutically about the meaning of Paul’s discourse, the essay will conclude with a final statement about the direction of our thought if it is to follow (or not) the argument of Acts 17.

2. Exegesis

In order to see clearly the shape of Luke’s theology as it is expressed in Acts 17, we must think several things simultaneously. Because, however, we obviously

avored less censorship). This is simply to note that Paul’s speech actually works somewhat better for Milton’s purposes than Isocrates’s: in Milton’s way of seeing things, Paul had at least been able to read the Greeks.

17 Subtle exegetes have attempted to distinguish between various degrees of ‘supplementation’ or ‘correction’—the philosophers need less correction than the wider populus. See, e.g., the article of Gerhard Schneider, ‘Anknüpfung, Kontinuität und Widerspruch in der Areopagrede Apg 17,22–31’, *Kontinuität und Einheit* (ed. Paul-Gerhard Müller and Werner Stenger; Freiburg: Herder, 1981) 173–8, wherein the ‘Widerspruch’ is explicated entirely in terms of the Christians and Stoics together over against the everyday pagan. Rudolf Bultmann, ‘Anknüpfung und Widerspruch: Zur Frage nach der Anknüpfung der neutestamentlichen Verkündigung an die natürliche Theologie der Stoa, die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen und die Gnosis’, *TZ* 2 (1946) 401–18, is typically thought-provoking: for Bultmann, the *Anknüpfung* just is the *Widerspruch*.

18 The critical text is that of Otto Stählin (updated by Ludwig Früchtel), *Clemens Alexandrinus* II (GCS 15; Berlin: Akademie, 1960), here 58–9. Perhaps the most interesting contemporary reading on this question is—unsurprisingly—the Gifford lectures (e.g., Gilson, Barth, Pelikan, Barr, Hauerwas et al.).

cannot write about them all simultaneously, we shall have to discuss these matters in order on the way to comprehending their significance with a single glance. There are five principal points.

(1) Analyses of the speeches in Acts have been crucially important in demonstrating beyond reasonable doubt that Luke wrote them himself (as did ancient historiographers more generally).¹⁹ But this focus also courts a hermeneutical danger, namely, the substitution of a different interpretive context—that of the scholarly template provided for speech analysis—for the one Luke has created through the construction of his narrative.²⁰ As more recent scholarship has shown, ignoring the hermeneutical importance of narrative is hardly the way to develop a sophisticated reading of a passage whose meaning is inextricably tied to the overall development of a whole story.²¹ In relation to the Areopagus speech, this point becomes particularly important due to the interpretively indispensable remarks that preface the entire speech:

While Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was vexed within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he argued...in the market place every day with those who chanced to be there. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also met him; and some said, 'What would this poser say?' Others said, 'He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities'—because Paul had preached Jesus [masc.] and the resurrection [fem.]. And they seized him and brought him to the Areopagus saying, 'We have the right to know what this new teaching is you present. For you bring some strange things to our ears. We want to know, therefore, what these things mean' (17.16–20; my translation).

The point of hermeneutically preparatory remarks, of course, is to position the reader in certain ways rather than others prior to the coming material. In this case, Luke positions his readers in at least three particularly significant ways. First, by narrating Paul's reaction to Athens as a whole—he is 'vexed' at its rampant 'idolatry'—Luke points explicitly to the overriding theological evaluation of the city's spiritual and intellectual traditions (17.16). Whatever the rich cultural heritage of Athens, Paul's focus lies elsewhere, i.e., on the malformation of religious life.

Second, the term used by the Stoics and Epicureans to disparage Paul's philosophical sophistication draws on the larger cultural encyclopedia to alert the reader to

19 As is well known, NT scholars have frequently looked for Luke's sources for his speeches. My formulation above is not intended to deny that Luke may well have had access to traditions/sources that helped him shape the speeches (or even exercised both formal and material restraints upon his literary creativity); its intent, rather, is simply to point to the significance of something recent scholarship has made unavoidable: any argument for a source/tradition behind the speeches must pass through the elegant and consistent manner by which Luke—throughout the speeches in Acts—has rendered literarily that which he has received. See also n. 40 below.

20 See C. Kavin Rowe, 'Acts 2:36 and the Continuity of Lukan Christology', *NTS* 53 (2007) 37–56.

21 See, e.g., Joel B. Green, 'The Problem of a Beginning: Israel's Scriptures in Luke 1–2', *BBR* 4 (1994) 61–86.

watch for coming allusions to pagan works. *Σπερμιολόγος*, as Demosthenes, Dio Chrysostom, and other public intellectuals knew, was a word used to brand opponents as posers, loafers in the agora who had, at best, picked up a few proof-texts from one of the *florilegia* floating around the cities.²² Their ‘scraps’ of knowledge, so the term suggests, hardly amounted to true philosophical understanding. Of course, by this point in the discourse of Acts, those who insult the main characters utter judgments that the readers of the narrative simply distrust. No Christian reader of Acts would think to agree with the slur of the Stoics and Epicureans. To the contrary, through Luke’s careful frontloading of this spurious charge, Acts’ readers are both inoculated against such a suspicion—it is gotten out of the way, as it were—and encouraged to discern in the coming allusions to pagan philosophical/religious traditions a deep argumentative significance.

Third, it is noteworthy that Paul is actually on trial. This fact has often been overlooked by NT scholars who assume that the phrase ἐπὶ τὸν Ἄρειον πάγον refers simply to the hill of Ares where Paul made his speech. But in fact, ‘the Areopagus’ refers more precisely to ἡ ἐξ Ἄρειου πάγου Βουλή, which, unsurprisingly, took its name from its meeting place: the hill of Ares. As T. D. Barnes convincingly showed, the frequent assertion that the council no longer met at this place is basically groundless.²³ Its sole piece of (alleged) hard ancient evidence is a single statement in Pseudo-Demosthenes, and even that has now been discredited by Barnes. The reason, therefore, that Luke does not distinguish between ‘Areopagus as hill upon which Paul spoke’ and ‘Areopagus as city council before which Paul spoke’ is because such a distinction would have been pointless.

Moreover, it is exceedingly difficult to make sense of Luke’s use of ἐπιλαμβάνομαι and the phrase ἐν μέσῳ on the idea that Paul was simply and cordially escorted to the hill for a better audience (17.19, 22). The former word is most often used in the Lukan writings to refer to the ‘seizing’ or ‘laying hold of’ the Christians,²⁴ and the latter is almost always ‘amidst’.²⁵ So, too, δύνομαι in δυνάμεθα γνῶναι τίς ἡ καινὴ αὐτῆ ἢ ὑπὸ σοῦ λαλουμένη διδασχὴ (17.19) is not the polite ‘may we’ of the RSV, etc. but more like ‘we have the [legal] right to know’, as in Acts 25.11 or P. Oxy 899 (ln. 31; second/third centuries).²⁶

22 E.g., Demosthenes *De Corona* 18.127 [269]; Dio Chrysostom *Discourse* 32.9.

23 T. D. Barnes, ‘An Apostle on Trial’, *JTS* 20 (1969) 407–19.

24 Cf. esp. Acts 16.19 where Luke, as he does here in 17.19, employs ἐπιλαμβάνομαι with the preposition ἐπὶ in order to speak about Paul and Silas’s appearance before certain authorities: ‘[H]aving seized [ἐπιλαβόμενοι] Paul and Silas, they dragged them into the agora [ἐπὶ τοὺς ἄρχοντας]’ (cf. ἐπὶ τοὺς πολιτάρχας in 17.6). See also Luke 23.26; Acts 16.19; 17.6; 18.17; 21.30, 33. Cf. Jerome’s translation of ἐπιλαμβάνομαι in 17.19 as *apprehendere* (*et apprehensum eum ad Areopagum duxerunt*).

25 Cf. esp. Acts 27.21: σταθεὶς ὁ Παῦλος ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν εἶπεν ἔδει μὲν ὧ ἄνδρες; see also Luke 2.46; 8.7; 10.3; 22.27; 24.36; Acts 1.15; 2.22.

26 LSJ, 452.

In short, Paul was seized and brought to the tribunal that had the legal right to try him for the specific charges brought against him (see below), and it is in the midst of this council that he speaks and from which he departs (17.33, ἐξῆλθεν ἐκ μέσου αὐτῶν). As Barnes rightly observed, ‘the obvious meaning of the words in Acts should be accepted: Paul was taken before the Areopagus, i.e. before the council sitting on the hill’.²⁷

A trial setting is also presupposed by the deep resonance with Socrates’s famous trial, in which the crime of ‘introducing new/strange divinities’ figured prominently.²⁸ From Xenophon and Plato to Josephus and Justin Martyr, the ancients spoke of the charges against Socrates in terms of his attempt to bring into Athens new or strange deities, and of the corresponding rejection of the gods of the polis.²⁹ Diogenes Laertius, for example, who evidently believed that he was citing from the original affidavit, wrote that ‘Socrates is guilty of refusing to recognize the gods recognized by the polis, and of introducing other, new divinities’ (*Lives* 2.40).³⁰ Obviously Luke could not have read Diogenes Laertius; nor do we have any firm evidence that he knew Xenophon or Plato. But the similarity between Luke’s careful phrasing and the grammatical fundament upon which ancient testimony is constructed would be obvious to anyone acquainted with the philosophic or even popular traditions surrounding the death of Socrates: ξένων δαιμονίων (v. 18), ἡ καινὴ αὐτῆ ἡ διδασχὴ, ξενίζοντα, εἰσφέρεις (v. 19–20), ξένοι, καινότερον (v. 21).

Indeed, Athens itself was reputed to be a place of considerable risk for all who would deal in foreign religious matters, as figures from Euripides to Josephus were well aware. Citing the case of Ninus the priestess, for example, Josephus informs his readers that in Athens the ‘penalty decreed for any who introduced a foreign god was death’ (*C. Ap.* 2.267–68).³¹ And despite being the home of antiquity’s greatest thinkers and scholars, wrote Apuleius, the city’s treatment of Socrates had nevertheless resulted in its ‘perpetual ignominy’ (*Met.* 10.33): Athens was the place where everyone knew that to bring in foreign or new deities was to invite trial and court death.

27 Barnes, ‘An Apostle on Trial’, 410.

28 It is important to note that the interpretive move runs the other way as well: the Socratic echoes also rightfully reinforce the reading of the scene as a trial. That Socrates was tried in the People’s Court does not substantively alter the impact of the resonance: it merely helps to describe more precisely the actual shape of the analogy.

29 The other charge frequently reported was that of ‘corrupting the youth’—which was in essence yet another political charge. On this point, see Peter Garnsey, ‘Religious Toleration in Classical Antiquity’, *Persecution and Toleration* (ed. W. J. Sheils; London: Blackwell, 1984) 1–27.

30 Cf., e.g., Xenophon *Memorabilia* I.1.1, 3, et passim; Plato *Apol.* 24BC, 28E–30E, et passim; Josephus *C. Ap.* 2.262–64; Justin Martyr *I Apol.* 5.4.

31 Cf. Euripides *Bacchae* lns. 255–9.

Luke's culturally careful and philologically precise narration creates the analogical space in which the trial of Socrates informs that of Paul. Readers of Acts are thereby enabled to see in the seizure of Paul the potential for death. Like Socrates, Paul appears before the governing Athenian council under the suspicion of introducing strange, new deities (Jesus and Resurrection), and, like Socrates, Paul may well meet his end.

(2) Δεισιδαίμων: NT exegetes have frequently observed that Paul's opening line can be read in standard terms as a *captatio benevolentiae*: 'And Paul, standing in the middle of the Areopagus, said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that you are exceptionally religious [δεισιδαίμωνέστερος] in every way" ' (17.22).³² As all ancient rhetors and important councils knew—and as Luke clearly did himself (see esp. Acts 24.2–3, for example)—such a move was a conventional way to win goodwill at the outset of a case. To read Paul's sally in this way presupposes, of course, that δεισιδαίμωνέστερος is best rendered 'exceptionally religious' rather than 'superstitious' (another entirely valid meaning of the word).³³ Opening one's *apologia* with a highly charged and well-known insult—'I perceive that you are all *superstitious*'—would hardly qualify as a rhetorically suave *captatio benevolentiae*: as a way to angle for one's life in political waters, it would seem rather inexpedient, to say the least.

Yet, as other scholars have seen, the reader is well aware that Paul is already vexed at the city's rampant idolatry.³⁴ It would therefore make more sense, so this line of thinking goes, to read δεισιδαίμωνέστερος in accordance with 17.16. As Luke tells it, Paul does not think the Athenians are particularly pious but exceptionally superstitious—or in Jewish theological language, idolatrous.

32 E.g., Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 520. See, however, Apuleius *Met.* 10.7, and Lucian *Anacharsis, or Athletics* 19, both of whom speak of the dangers of trying to influence the Areopagus through rhetorical maneuvering.

33 Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 520, thinks that 'superstition' is an entirely modern concept. If by this Haenchen means to say that we as moderns know that the tricks involved in palm-reading, crystals, etc. are nothing but tricks—and therefore unreal and untrue in some sort of metaphysical sense—then of course he is right. The conception of the cosmos that buttressed the seriousness with which the ancients took their soothsayers is no longer ours. However, if we simply understand 'superstitious' to mean a kind of gross exaggeration and distortion of otherwise common features of religious life in the ancient world (as does Plutarch in his *De Superstitione*, for example), then our translation is on solid ground. On this matter and the word itself, see P. J. Koets, *Δεισιδαίμωνία: A Contribution to the Knowledge of the Religious Terminology in Greek* (Purmerend: J. Muusses, 1929); and, more recently, Dale B. Martin, *Inventing Superstition: From the Hippocratics to the Christians* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2004).

34 See the concise discussion in Barrett, *Acts*, 2.836.

But in fact, as Hans-Josef Klauck has rightly observed, to believe one is forced to choose between these two readings is already to have missed the Lukan literary technique and ruined its point. For *δαισιδαίμωνέστερος* is at one and the same time ‘exceptionally religious’ and ‘quite superstitious’.³⁵ That is to say, in the story world, the Areopagus hears the former—the Paul of Acts does not blunder verbally so badly or so quickly—while the reader, who is positioned hermeneutically by vv. 16–21, also hears the latter. To be sure, translation into English obscures the simultaneity of meaning in the one Greek word. But this should hardly be the cause of interpretive error. Luke’s point is rather clear. Through a deft use of dramatic irony, Luke unifies historical verisimilitude—and rhetorical skill—with theological judgment and, precisely in so doing, alerts the readers of Paul’s speech to its multi-level discourse.³⁶ Grasping the import of the speech, therefore, will involve considerably more than a flat or simplistic reading at a single level of meaning. At the very least, it will involve the ability to comprehend the rhetorical simultaneity of different levels of meaning.

(3) ‘An unknown god’: In the pyramid of well-known phrases from the Areopagus speech, ‘to an unknown god’ would surely vie with ‘in him we live and move and have our being’ for the top. Though we have yet to discover an inscription with *θεὸς ἄγνωστος* in the singular, this fact is of little to no interpretive consequence.³⁷ More significant is Paul’s attempt to tie this inscription together with a theology of creation. Given the charge of ‘newness’, it is unsurprising that Luke depicts Paul’s first argumentative move as an effort to rebuff this charge. ‘What you worship unknowingly,³⁸ this I proclaim to you’. I do not, implies Paul, bring in anything new at all. Rather, the one to whom I testify has preceded me here in Athens.

It is perhaps this remark more than any other that has led interpreters of the NT to think that Paul here extols the Athenians’ theological knowledge, i.e., that Luke portrays Paul as the consummate natural theologian. Long has the Unknown God been known in Athens!

35 E.g., Hans-Josef Klauck, *Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity: The World of the Acts of the Apostles* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999) 81–2. See also Daniel Marguerat, ‘Luc-Actes entre Jérusalem et Rome: Un Procédé Lucanien de Double Signification’, *NTS* 45 (1999) 70–87 (esp. 75). Marguerat’s article provides multiple instances of Luke’s semantic skill in constructing purposefully ambiguous statements.

36 On dramatic irony as a major Lukan literary technique, see C. Kavin Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, repr. 2009).

37 See, e.g., P. W. van der Horst, ‘The Unknown God’, *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World* (ed. R. van den Broek et al.; Leiden: Brill, 1998) 19–42.

38 It is possible to read the participle *ἀγνοούντες* as yet another instance of dramatic irony: if one translates ‘unknowingly’ for the ears of the Areopagus, Paul’s statement is much less offensive—because theologically critical—than if one translates ‘ignorantly’. Again: the connotative difference exists in Greek in the same word; it is only in English that the choice must be made.

Such a reading would hardly be unreasonable were it not for the fact that what Luke actually speaks of is not knowledge but *ignorance* of God. Such is the point of the alpha-privative—the God about whom Paul testifies remains *unknown* in Athens. The inscription ‘to the unknown God’, when taken literally, is thus to be read not as commendation of the Athenians’ theological penetration but instead as Athenian self-testimony to their need for the kind of knowledge that comes with Paul’s preaching. In short, the Athenians worship in ignorance and, as a precise epistemological correlate of this fact, do not know it.

(4) Aratus and the Rest: Understanding that Paul must avoid the charge of ‘newness’ should remove any surprise at Paul’s transition from the (now) famous inscription to theological criticism of a kind that could be found among many pagan philosophers. Modern theologians who naturally agree with the declaration οὐκ ἐν χειροποιήτοις ναοῖς κατοικεῖ οὐδὲ ὑπὸ χειρῶν ἀνθρωπίνων θεραπεύεται προσδεόμενός τινος (17.24–25) need do no more to remember its seriousness in the ancient world than reread Pausanias, who reports virtually countless instances of caring for divine images. The ivory statue of Athena on the Acropolis in Athens, to take a geographically relevant example from Pausanias’s ramblings, was treated with water to counteract the destructive effects of an overly arid location. And, even restricting ourselves to the same passage in Pausanias, we learn also that the image of Zeus in Olympus was regularly saturated with olive oil, and that of Asclepius in Epidaurus built over a cistern (*Desc. Gr.* 5.11.10–11).

But of course this is unsurprising. Images of the gods were wiped down, scraped clean, brought food, proffered mirrors—if they happened to be vain enough—chained, put on trial, exiled, and so on. In short, both in their shrines and without, they were the objects of a whole range of practices that could be seen, under the gaze of the philosopher’s eye, as crude statements about divinity itself. Divinity, such practices might imply, was tied essentially to its images and, therefore, could be said to require all manner of shelter and ministrations. Socrates, Plato, Varro, Seneca, Epictetus, Plutarch, the much-maligned and little-understood ‘atheists’, the Epicureans—the list could go on and on—all inveighed against such superstition and endeavored to sever the connection between crass conceptions of materially determined divinity and, as they saw it, divinity properly conceived. As Seneca once put it: ‘To beings who are sacred, immortal and inviolable, [people] consecrate images of the cheapest inert material. [These images] are called divinities, but if they were suddenly brought to life and encountered, they would be regarded as monsters’.³⁹

39 *De Superst.* (apud Augustine *De Civitate Dei* 6.10); cf., among many possible examples, Plutarch’s *Numa* 8.7–8, or his *De Superstitione*, esp. 167.

Paul's statement in vv. 24–25 resonates well with such sentiments and, in so doing, connects pieces of philosophical grammar to his theological discourse. Indeed, this is but the initial move in a continuing effort to speak with easily recognizable words of pagan tradition. When in 17.27, for example, Paul proclaims that 'God is not far from each one of us', he could be paraphrasing his contemporary Seneca: 'we do not need...to beg the keeper of a temple to let us approach his image's ear, as if in this way our prayers were more likely to be heard. God is near you, he is with you, he is in you' (*Ep.* 41.1; cf. *inter alios*, Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 12.28). 'In him we live and move and have our being' (17.28a) evokes a wide enough range of familiar philosophical thinking to have scholars scurrying from Plato to Posidonius and Epimenides to Epictetus in the effort to ferret out Luke's 'source'.⁴⁰ And, as all Acts scholars know, when Luke writes 'as even some of your poets have said...' (17.28), he then immediately cites one of the opening lines of Aratus's *Phaenomena*, a book whose ancient fame would be hard to overestimate: τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος εἰμὲν (*Phaen.* 5; Acts 17.28b, ἐσμὲν). Of course, Aratus himself may well echo the commencement of Cleanthes's *Hymn to Zeus*.⁴¹ If so, Luke's citation draws easily upon two layers of well-known tradition and seamlessly orchestrates their incorporation into the movement of the discourse. In short, Luke constructs Paul's *apologia* as an argument against the charge of bringing in new/strange divinities by means of an apparently appeasing recognition and reception of pagan philosophical traditions vis-à-vis 'divinity' or 'the Deity' (esp. 17.29).

It is tempting to read this as a theology of rapprochement, a rhetorically suave defense against 'newness' and 'foreignness' that works precisely because it establishes an equivalence between what Paul preaches and what the wisest pagans have always known. On this reading, Paul's proclamation and certain constitutive aspects of pagan philosophical thinking point to the same truth. Luke thus presents Paul in the hermeneutically charged act of 'translation'.⁴²

40 This is yet another place where a better sense of Luke's literary style would serve us well. Just to the degree that we comprehend that Luke is not a rigid copyist or a wooden interpreter of the texts and traditions he knows, we will find unnecessary the need to search for a 'source' from which Luke derived his philosophical-sounding sentences. Indeed, the whole search for a source can be interpreted as the effect of the power of allusion—as Luke here puts it to work—upon modern scholars of his text. That is, we do not search for a source to understand Luke's text but, to the contrary, precisely because we already move within the sphere created by the allusion. In Gadamer's terms, the search for a source is not to go behind the text as we have it but rather is itself a part of the text's effective history and, in a sense, counts as a certain kind of evidence that we have already understood at least part of what Luke means to say.

41 *SVF* 1.537 (pp. 121–2).

42 See, e.g., the classic statement by Dibelius, 'Paul in Athens', *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (London: SCM, 1956) 78–83: the Areopagus speech is a 'manner of constructing a Christian theology not on biblical, but on philosophical, especially Stoic, ideas' (82). The fundamental

Of course, to translate something is simply to say the same thing in another language. As any who have thought about translation could testify, however, even the easiest cases, when scrutinized, can turn out to be mortifyingly difficult.⁴³ In this case, to speak of ‘same-saying’ posits a basic synonymy between two fundamentally different grammars for the whole of life—pagan and Christian—on the basis of a vocabulary common to Luke’s argument and classic pagan texts and traditions of thought.⁴⁴ To be sure, various and sundry attempts at same-saying or translation were common in the ancient world. The second-century Jewish thinker Aristobulus, to take only one salient example, also cited the opening praise of Zeus in Aratus’s *Phaenomena* and simply substituted ‘God’ for ‘Zeus’. As Aristobulus put it, the ‘inherent meaning’ of the latter was finally the same as the former.⁴⁵ But reading Paul’s speech through the conceptual grid of ‘translation’ entirely overlooks the crucial fact that in Luke’s text the pagan philosophical vocabulary has been incorporated into a radically different overall interpretive framework: the biblical story that stretches from Adam to the return of Jesus Christ.

(5) Creation to Consummation: Whether or not Luke knew Paul’s thinking in Rom 5.12–21 is debatable, but it is nonetheless significant that the ‘story’ Luke tells in Paul’s Areopagus speech narrates the human drama in relation to Adam on the one hand and Jesus Christ on the other. Of course Luke’s Paul is attentive to his immediate context, and so employs his rhetorical skill accordingly: neither

translational assumption here of course is that a Christian theology actually could be erected on a Stoic basis. For a more recent example, see among many possible options, Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), who asserts that Paul ‘is making a proclamation of monotheism in its Christian form’ (518). Unwittingly perhaps, such a formulation treats Christianity as a subset of a more general theological reality (‘monotheism’). In this way of thinking, monotheism is the ultimate truth toward which both pagan philosophy and Christianity point, and is therefore the theological ground that makes possible a genuine translation: pagan philosophy and Christianity are ultimately about the same thing, as it were, even though they use different languages to speak of it. Whether Witherington intends this or not is unclear, for later in the commentary he seems both to retreat from this statement and to reaffirm it (534–5). That many scholars take ‘monotheism’ to be the theological essence of Christianity, the ‘highest’ form of religion in general, and so forth needs no elaboration. See, e.g., the ‘Introduction’ by Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede, eds., *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999) 1–20.

43 Think, for example, of the multifaceted questions that one must engage to explain Luther’s translation of ἐκκλησία not by *Kirche* but by *Gemeinde*.

44 See below on ancient philosophy as a way of life.

45 Eusebius *Praep. Evang.* 13.12. For the text and translation of Aristobulus, see Carl R. Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors*. Vol. III. *Aristobulus* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1995) 171–3.

figure is overtly named. And this makes good political sense: the denizens of the Athenian court know of neither man. But it is beyond doubt that the Christian readers of Acts know the identity of the man whom God raised from the dead and appointed to judge the world in righteousness (17.31).⁴⁶ No less clear is the identity of the ‘one’ from whom God made ‘every nation of humanity to dwell on the whole face of the earth’ (17.26).⁴⁷ For Luke no less than for Jews or other early Christians, it is in Adam that humanity has its origins (cf. Luke 3.38).

By situating human existence within God’s creative purpose in Adam and eschatological end in Jesus Christ, Luke enframes the totality of human life. He is thus able to narrate the whole of human history in terms of a drama of divine hope and human ignorance. ‘And he made from one every nation of humanity...that they should seek God in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. But he is not far from each one of us.... The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent’ (vv. 26–30).⁴⁸ That is to say, the history of humanity unfolds in just such a way as to require repentance—the necessary correlate of acknowledging the man whom God has raised from the dead (vv. 30–31).

It is within this totalizing framework—what things human could transpire before Adam or after the end of the world?—that the appropriation of pagan tradition occurs. Aratus, Cleanthes, the deep similarity with Stoic theological vocabulary, and so on, all appear within the perspective created by the order of thought that begins with Adam and ends with Jesus Christ. To grasp the importance of this hermeneutical context for ‘reading’ pagan tradition is at once to see that Luke’s appropriation is not translation. It is, rather, a transformation of preexisting tradition at the most fundamental level of the unity between thought and life. In truth, the pagan philosophical grammar is sufficiently reorganized to the point that it speaks a different language.

3. Hermeneutics as a Way of Life

If we take in the five exegetical points above with a single glance, three crucially important and interrelated insights immediately become apparent.

46 So, rightly, Barrett, *Acts*, 2.852, among others.

47 This is yet another instance of Luke’s use of dramatic irony: the members of the Areopagus can well hear a connection to Stoic ‘oneness’ doctrine, but the readers of Acts know of course that the ‘one’ is Adam. Cf. Marguerat, ‘Luc–Actes entre Jérusalem et Rome’, 75.

48 Many English translations of Acts 17.27 suggest that the gentiles have found God. This is a mistake. The optative mood of *ψηλαφήσειαν* and *εὔροτεν* expresses the wish or hope of God’s creative purpose but not the fact that the Gentiles have ‘touched and found’. Indeed, Luke’s point is just the opposite: *despite* such a hope the Gentiles have remained ignorant of God, that is, they have *not* touched or found God. The *καί γε* that begins the next sentence makes this point explicit.

First, by placing the vocabulary of pagan philosophy inside the hermeneutical context of creation (vv. 24, 26) and eschaton (vv. 30–31), Luke renders obsolete the original structures of meaning in which the pagan phrases occur and, therefore, radically alters their sense. Precisely because words cannot themselves be Stoic or Platonist or anything else—they are ‘Stoic’ only because of the larger interpretive scheme in which they are located, viz. Stoicism—their occurrence in Paul’s Areopagus speech bespeaks their transformation.

To know that God is ‘not far’ from us is not to cultivate an inner awareness of the possibilities of self-transcendence or our materially deep ties to ultimate reality—*Deus sive Natura*, as Spinoza later put it—but is to become aware of the creative *telos* of the Lord of heaven and earth (vv. 24–27). To be ‘God’s offspring’ is no longer, as the *Phaenomena* of Aratus would construe it, to be children of Zeus who can read the meaning in the stars but is instead, on Luke’s counter-reading, to be children of the Living God who reject the confusion between Creator and creature. In the overall logic of the speech, that is to say, Aratus’s line is situated within the theological direction of Genesis 1—from God toward humanity—and is thus reversed: humanity’s divine origin actually testifies to the break between God (Creator) and world (creature) and, hence, excludes our ability to image God. Inasmuch as humans are the living offspring of the living God, we cannot image him (esp. vv. 28–29). To live and move and have our being in God, therefore, is to know as ‘ignorance’ the way of life that constructs ‘God’ from the materials of the human imaginative arts and sciences.⁴⁹ In short, to read the allusions to pagan traditions in Acts 17 is to encounter the truth of the words not on their own terms but on Luke’s.

Second, seeing the truth of pagan tradition on Luke’s terms is not only an apperceptive adjustment, cognitive correction, or internal realignment of the intellect. Rather, as the end of Paul’s speech makes so clear, to shift from the ‘unknown God’ to knowledge of him is to move into and inhabit the way of life constituted by repentance and the recognition of the identity of the man who was raised from the dead.⁵⁰ ‘The times of ignorance God overlooked—but now (!) he commands everyone everywhere to repent’ (v. 30). The kind of knowledge at which Luke’s discourse aims is a theological perspective that is nothing short of a way of being in the world, an overall pattern that takes account not only of intellect but of a whole life. Thus in the Lukan sense to overcome ‘ignorance’ (ἄγνοια, v. 30) is finally to live a different life.

49 With characteristic clarity, Barrett, *Acts*, 2.850–1, remarks, ‘From nature the Greeks have evolved not natural theology but natural idolatry’.

50 Cf. Alfons Weiser, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (2 vols.; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1981/1985) 2.479–80. Weiser’s concise and well-formulated excursus constitutes another exception to the dominant interpretive trend.

To put this point in relation to the rest of Acts: the Areopagus discourse should not be read as an aberration within Luke's narrative of an otherwise deeply disruptive Christian mission in the wider Graeco-Roman world. In Lystra, Iconium, Philippi, Corinth, Ephesus, and so on, the Christian mission as it is depicted in Acts not only encounters but even engenders considerable cultural chaos. In accordance with such a narrative pattern, the speech in Acts 17 is yet another powerful example in Luke's larger literary program of the collision between the Christian habitus and (locally) antecedent pagan traditions, a moment in which the wisdom of those who do not know God is transfigured by the bearer of the message of Jesus' resurrection.⁵¹ Athens is not little Lystra, of course, and so the collision is more subtle or layered—in a word, philosophical. But it is, at bottom, a collision nonetheless. What is at stake in the appropriation and transformation of pagan tradition is not a simple difference in theoretical viewpoint but the difference in the total configuration of life that emerges out of conflicting claims to truth about the ultimate origin and destiny of humanity. Human beings, created by the God of Israel, now find their *telos*—in every significant sense of the word—on a particular day and in relation to a particular man. God 'has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed' (v. 31).⁵² Human life is therefore to be lived in light of the intersection and existentially thick correlation between the whole world and the resurrection of Jesus. To put it differently, in the Lukan way of seeing things, the revelation of the unknown God results in a way of patterning human life that is oriented toward the last day. It is this life, so Paul's speech would claim, to which the Athenians must turn to know God and to live rightly in the world.

Third, taken together, points one and two sharpen the case against reading Acts 17 as 'translation' by exposing the fact that for the translation to work it would have to presuppose a synonymous take on a total context for life. But of course, as the work of Pierre Hadot and others has shown, it was no less the case for ancient philosophy than it was for early Christianity that to 'think' philosophically was to 'live' in a pattern of life.⁵³

51 See especially Chapter 2 of C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (New York: Oxford University, 2009).

52 This determination of the entire cosmos by a specific human being reveals the deep unity between the vastness and the particularity of Luke's theological vision: the totality of what is, is immediately and irrevocably related to the one whom God raised from the dead. And this relation, moreover, is one that determines the lives of all who now live. Such is the underlying logic of repentance for 'everyone, everywhere'.

53 See the collection of essays in Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995). For a brief entrée into Hadot's thought, see his *The Present Alone is Our Happiness: Conversations with Jeannie Carlier and Arnold I. Davidson* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2009). Arthur Darby Nock's famous description

Because thinking and living were sundered on the way to modernity—‘philosophy’ now seems to refer only to the former—as a matter of course we moderns inhabit an intellectually problematical way of reading ancient philosophy. We tend to think, that is, that philosophy in the Graeco-Roman world was thinking about thinking (epistemology/logic), or thinking about living (ethics), or thinking about the world (physics/cosmology).⁵⁴ But, more properly described, ancient philosophy was a certain kind of *thinking life* in which thinking and living were not simply close correlates but were intimately, even inseparably, intertwined. ‘O Philosophia—Guide of life’, began Cicero’s well-known hymn to philosophy (*Tusculan Disputations* 5.5).⁵⁵ Epistemology, ethics, physics, and so on were readings of the world that emerged out of and were directed toward an overall existential posture and lived intellectual pattern. As Plutarch put it when comparing statecraft to philosophy: the *hoi polloi* ‘think that philosophers [are those] who sit in a chair and converse and prepare their lectures over books. But the continuous practice of statecraft and philosophy, which is daily seen in acts and deeds, they fail to perceive’. ‘Socrates philosophized’, continues Plutarch, ‘but he did not set out benches or seat himself in an armchair or observe a fixed hour for conversing or promenading with his students. Instead, he joked with them...drank with them...served in the army or lounged in the agora with some of them and finally was imprisoned and drank the poison. He was the first to show that human life at all times and in all its parts, in all its pathos and its deeds, admits of philosophy’.⁵⁶ In antiquity, philosophy was nothing less than ‘a mode of existing-in-the-world, which had to be practiced at each instant, and the goal of which was to transform the whole of the individual’s life’.⁵⁷

of philosophy as that which provides the best analogy to early Christianity because it offered a ‘scheme of life’ is in fundamental agreement with basic aspects of Hadot’s position.

54 The well-known Stoic division of philosophy into logic, physics, and ethics—which can be traced at least to Xenocrates, the onetime head of the Platonic Academy—is of course in view here. The point is to draw attention to how readily we assimilate such a division into our own terms without realizing that it was a division that corresponded not to three different kinds of abstract philosophical discussion but instead to sets of ‘spiritual exercises’ intended to lead the practitioner more deeply into the philosophical life.

55 ‘O vitae Philosophia dux...’. Book 5 contrasts Philosophia with Fortuna as ultimate determinative factors in one’s happiness. Cicero’s position, of course, is that—despite the manifest agonies inflicted by Fortuna (esp. 5.1)—Philosophia provides the pattern of life by which virtue, and thus happiness, can be obtained.

56 *Whether an Old Man Should Engage in Public Affairs (An Seni Respublica Gerenda Sit)*, 26. Cf., among many other examples, the opening lines of *On Stoic Self-Contradictions (De Stoicorum Repugnantiis)*, which emphasize the unity of philosophic thought and life.

57 Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 265.

Of course to put things this way is to risk turning the philosophers into ancient existentialists.⁵⁸ This they were not. After all, with few exceptions,⁵⁹ in practice neither Stoicism nor Platonism nor much anything else was fundamentally incompatible with the everyday tasks or sense of community that came with immersion in civic life.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, philosophers from Plato to Marcus Aurelius to Plotinus were engaged in the attempt to live out a total life as both a striving for and reflection of the deepest wisdom on ultimate matters.⁶¹ In Plato's classic formulation, philosophy was not just thinking, it was training for death.⁶²

Thus in the fullest sense, for Luke to have translated the Christian way of being into a Stoic one,⁶³ he would have had to say that the pattern of life that is called Stoicism is the same as the total pattern of life that is called Christianity. This he plainly does not do.⁶⁴ Indeed, what Luke says is that there is a very different way to

58 A risk Hadot constructively exploits in his essay on the figure of Socrates (*Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 147–78).

59 Certain kinds of Cynics would constitute the primary exception (e.g., Diogenes of Sinope). The criticism of Epicurean hypocrisy we find, for example, in Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* 1.115, presupposes their participation in normal religious/civic life.

60 The general lack of reflection on this aspect of ancient philosophy is a weakness in Hadot's work. He does address this matter in relation to the Skeptics, who directly affirmed the importance of daily life, but as a whole it is disregarded vis-à-vis other philosophical traditions. When Hadot says, for example, that there is a 'rupture between the philosopher and the conduct of everyday life' or that a philosopher's daily life is 'utterly foreign to the everyday world' (*Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 57–8), he obscures the fact that traditional philosophical schemes of life could quite easily incorporate large segments of the political and economic status quo. That Aristotle was a tutor to Alexander, or that Seneca (with Burrus) helped to run the Empire while Nero was young, or that Marcus Aurelius drew from Epictetus (or that Marcus Aurelius was himself an Emperor!), and so on should considerably complicate the thesis that the 'spiritual exercises' of the philosophers were intended to remove them entirely from normal daily life. Elsewhere it seems that Hadot does recognize this point, but he does not reflect on its significance (e.g., *What is Ancient Philosophy?* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2002] 108). It may well be that Hadot is focused more on the ideal philosophical life than what actually took place, but the critical point about the weight of everyday life—even for philosophers—remains.

61 Even the Skeptics had a view (!), namely, that these matters could not be definitely decided.

62 See, e.g., his *Phaedo*.

63 Despite the fact that in the ancient world the Christians were occasionally lumped together with the Epicureans—on the idea that both groups denied the gods and were therefore 'atheists' (see, e.g., Lucian *Alexander the False Prophet* 25, 38)—commentators on Acts have rightly seen that Epicureanism is *prima facie* incompatible with Christianity in a way that constitutes a marked difference from Stoicism. The latter philosophy is really the only one of the two whose echoes rumble loudly enough in Paul's speech to raise serious questions for our consideration.

64 Moreover, this 'same-saying' would have to hold for the entirety of the Acts narrative in that the whole of the way Luke tells the story would need to be translatable into a Stoic way of life. That is, were Luke to have written the Areopagus discourse in such a way as to make the

understand the cosmos and humanity's place therein. The end of human life is now (cf. τὰ νῦν in v. 30) to be seen in terms of the rhythm of existence that is repentance and in light of the eschatological reality of the coming Judge. The implications for the interpretation of this speech should thus be clear. In the deepest sense, readers of Acts who advocate for translation as the interpretive lens through which to see Paul's speech either fail to take ancient philosophy seriously as philosophy or unwittingly mistake bits and pieces of verbal or conceptual overlap for a pattern of life—or, alas, do both at once.

4. Conclusion

Against the long tradition of reading Paul's Areopagus speech as a 'translation' of Christian theological convictions into pagan philosophical terms, this article has argued that the traditional way of understanding this portion of Acts overlooks hermeneutically indispensable exegetical details (part 2) and the larger conceptual issues involved in speaking about the translation of one kind of thinking life into another (part 3). The idea that merely using the same words—from Aratus, Cleanthes, Seneca, or whomever—would issue in agreement on a total pattern of life is simply an illusion. Common vocabulary is in itself never more than common vocabulary. The crucial question is rather about the larger grammar in which particular words or phrases occur.

In the case of the Areopagus speech, meticulous attention to the narrative logic of the scene reveals a fundamentally Christian grammar—one in which words gain their meaning from their embeddedness in a linguistic pattern whose ordering syntactical principles derive from the coordination of a specific human being's life history with an eschatological conception of the world.⁶⁵ To the extent that recognizing the truth of this coordination requires the form of knowledge given through repentance and the forgiveness of sins, Acts 17 speaks of a regulative schema for human life no less than for our thought. Attending to the vocabulary common to Acts and pagan tradition thus opens out not upon similarity but upon an existentially rich difference.

To put this point another way, Luke's method of telling the story of Paul's speech does not lead him to articulate narratively a manner of thinking that would—were it to exist—encompass both Stoicism and Christianity as total ways of life, a kind of general or more comprehensive grammar that would transcend intellectually the particularities of Christian language about the world (or Stoic language—or whatever). To the contrary, Luke recognizes the conflict and

argument for translation, we would expect to be able to map Stoicism and Acts onto one another without any major difficulties (or else accuse Luke of gross conceptual ineptitude).

65 Cf. Schneider, *Apostelgeschichte*, 2.234.

confrontation that occurs when irreducibly particular patterns of life offer irreducibly different ways of being. Of course, he also knows that were Paul to make this overly explicit in Athens, he could lose his life. Luke thus crafts a careful speech that employs vocabulary common to Christian and pagan tradition alike (indeed, enough to save Paul's life) but whose meaning is fundamentally evangelistic (enough to cause the full range of mockery, continued interest, and conversion⁶⁶). That modern scholars have had trouble avoiding the temptation to reduce this theological move to a more general hermeneutics is not surprising given our typical neglect of rigorous philosophical thinking, but it is not for that reason any less obfuscating when it comes to Paul's speech. In Lukan logic, neither Stoicism nor Christianity is subsumed under anything else. They are—and remain—different and competing languages about the truth of the world.

66 Of particular interest is the group (οἱ δέ) that says 'we will hear you again about this'. I do not take this to signify the philosophical possibility of translation but rather to gesture toward the complex realities of kerygmatic communication. This group hears words they have heard before while simultaneously realizing that something has changed—that their philosophical traditions have been (re)interpreted in ways they do not (yet?) understand. Their interest is thus aroused. They are not resistant to the point of sneering, but neither are they brought to conversion.