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Moral Progress in Early Christian Stories of the Soul*

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This article explores the ways the story of the soul's present plight and its return to the divine realm is narrated in different Nag Hammadi treatises, and to what effect. The soul's condition is a central concern in two types of stories: there are (1) demiurgical myths, in which the soul's origin is ascribed to an inferior creator-god, and (2) plainer stories of the soul, which are solely focused on the soul, without a creation narrative. The main sources for the latter type are the *Exegesis on the Soul* (NHC II, 6) and *Authoritative Teaching* (*Authentikos Logos*, NHC VI, 3). In addition to these texts, three demiurgical myths from Nag Hammadi Codex II, are drawn into the discussion: *The Secret Book of John*, *The Nature of the Rulers*, and *On the Origin of the World*.

The soul pestered by emotions is one of the themes that connects these stories with the long-standing philosophical tradition, starting from Plato's dialogues. The portrayals of this theme become increasingly 'demonic', but even the soul's battle against demons is first and foremost a battle against emotions. A new element in these stories is the emphasis placed upon repentance as bringing about transformation in the soul. Although strong sexual imagery is used in these texts to describe both the mythic past and the soul's present plight, the analysis suggests that sexual lust is not the only moral concern in them. Some texts discussed in this article show far greater concern with wine, luxury, good looks, pride, and arrogance than with illicit sex.

Keywords: Nag Hammadi Library, Platonic Christianity, mythmaking, emotions, luxury

A great number of the texts in the Nag Hammadi Library[1] pay considerable attention to describing the soul's plight in the present world, the things that lure it

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1 The term 'library' is potentially misleading in this connection since the Nag Hammadi hoard comprises a number of smaller collections of texts. For different views about which individual

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away from what is genuinely good, and the ways of escaping from these inferior attractions. In this collection, the soul's condition is usually explored in the form of narratives. This issue stands in focus not only in labyrinthine stories of how the world was created by an ignorant creator-god. There are also plainer stories of the soul, in which its present plight and the difficulties it experiences on its way back are narrated without adducing any account of the creation of the world.

In what follows, I will call the more mythical variety 'demiurgical' and the plainer variety 'nondemiurgical'. The clearest representatives of the nondemiurgical variety are the *Exegesis on the Soul* in Nag Hammadi Codex II and the *Authoritative Discourse* in Nag Hammadi Codex VI. In addition to them, I will discuss here three demiurgical texts in Nag Hammadi Codex II: *The Secret Book of John*, *The Nature of the Rulers*, and *On the Origin of the World*. I seek to demonstrate that, in both types of stories, ethical concerns are intrinsically linked with the portraits painted of the soul's present condition in the state of forgetfulness, and its transformation, described in terms of its awakening and ascent.

Although specialists have addressed the philosophical background of moral teachings in Nag Hammadi texts for quite some time, these texts have not yet gained the attention they merit in the study of early Christianity and ancient philosophy. To mention only one example, a valuable new collection of essays related to the topic of this study contains three chapters on Paul and one on Clement of Alexandria, but none on Nag Hammadi texts.[2] And yet these texts contain lots of evidence on these issues, as has been amply demonstrated already in the studies by Takashi Onuki, Clemens Scholten, and Michael Williams, all published in the 1980s.[3] One of the claims I seek to make here is that the Nag Hammadi texts are no less relevant than Paul and Clement in the big picture of how early Christians adopted and adapted philosophical traditions related to moral progress.

It has been suggested that the two nondemiurgical texts to be discussed here presuppose a demiurgical myth but do not want to lay it bare to less advanced audiences. In the most recent English translation of the Nag Hammadi Library,

codices originally belonged together, see, e.g., Alexandr Khosroyev, *Die Bibliothek von Nag Hammadi: Einige Probleme des Christentums in Ägypten während der ersten Jahrhunderte* (ASKÄ 7; Altenberge: Oros, 1995) 20–2; Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism': An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1996) 242–4.

2 *Passions and Moral Progress in Greco-Roman thought* (ed. John T. Fitzgerald; London: Routledge, 2008).

3 Takashi Onuki, *Gnosis und Stoa* (NTOA 9; Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag, 1989); Clemens Scholten, *Martyrium und Sophiamythos im Gnostizismus nach den Texten von Nag Hammadi* (JACE 14; Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1987) 120–33; Michael A. Williams, *The Immovable Race: A Gnostic Designation and the Theme of Stability in Late Antiquity* (NHS 29; Leiden: Brill, 1985) 127–9.

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The Nag Hammadi Scriptures, the *Exegesis on the Soul* is introduced as an attempt 'to explain the doctrine of gnosis in a rather simple and attractive form' and 'to communicate the message to a wider public and not only to the members of a Gnostic group'.[4] In like manner, the *Authoritative Discourse* is described as 'a tractate written with the goal of simplifying and proclaiming the Gnostic myth of the soul'.[5]

The more general problems connected with the term 'Gnosticism' (and with the discourse of orthodoxy and heresy the usage of this term maintains) have already been addressed often enough and need not be discussed here.[6] Suffice it to say that the exoteric interpretation of the *Exegesis on the Soul* and the *Authoritative Discourse* finds little support in these two texts themselves: unlike Ptolemaeus in his *Letter to Flora* (and unlike John's gospel, for that matter),[7] nowhere do their authors promise subsequent, and more advanced, teaching.

The alternative model I seek to develop here is that the plain, nondemiurgical stories of the soul, and the more complicated demiurgical stories are narrative variations on one and the same basic 'script':[8] both sets of myths are used to

4 Madeleine Scopello, 'The *Exegesis on the Soul* (NHC II, 6): Introduction', *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition* (ed. Marvin Meyer; New York: HarperOne, 2007) 223–6, esp. 224, 226. For other scholars maintaining that *Exegesis* should be understood as a Gnostic text, see, e.g., Barbara Aland, *Was ist Gnosis: Studien zum frühen Christentum, zu Marcion und zur kaiserzeitlichen Philosophie* (WUNT 239; Tübingen: Mohr 2009) 39; Jean-Marie Sevrin, ed., *L'Exégèse de l'Âme (NH II, 6)* (BCNHÉ 9; Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1983) 39–41. For scholars affirming that *Exegesis* is not a Gnostic text, see Cornelia Kulawik, *Die Erzählung über die Seele (Nag-Hammadi-Codex II, 6)* (TU 155; Berlin: de Gruyter) 7–9; Hugo Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth: Cognitive Poetics and Transformational Soteriology in the* Gospel of Philip *and the* Exegesis of the Soul (NHMS 73; Leiden: Brill, 2010) 134–40. Instead of a Gnostic reading of *Exeg. Soul*, Lundhaug proposes that this text 'would also have been amenable to the interests of the Pachomians and even to those of Shenoute's monastic community' (149).

5 Madeleine Scopello, 'The *Authoritative Discourse* (NHC VI, 3): Introduction', *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures* (ed. Meyer) 379–82, esp. 382; cf. also Scopello, *Femme, Gnose et Manichéisme: De l'espace mythique au territoire du réel* (NHMS 53; Leiden: Brill, 2005) 155. For non-Gnostic interpretations of the *Auth. Disc.*, see Roelof van den Broek, *Studies in Gnosticism and Alexandrian Christianity* (NHMS 39; Leiden: Brill, 1996) 206–34; Ulla Tervahauta, 'A Story of the Soul's Journey in the Nag Hammadi Library: A Study of Authentikos Logos (NHC VI,3)' (Th.D. diss., University of Helsinki 2013).

6 For critical analyses of the scholarly usage of the term 'Gnosticism', from two different perspectives, see Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism'*; Karen L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2003); for my summary of this discussion and how it should change our understanding of the school of Valentinus, see Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University, 2008) 14–31.

7 John 16.12, 25; Ptolemaeus *Letter to Flora* 33.7.8–10.

8 For such 'scripts', both in theory and as applied to early Christian literature, see István Czachesz, 'Rewriting and Textual Fluidity in Antiquity: Exploring the Socio-Cultural and

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address, in narrative form, the soul's ideal state, the obstacles that hinder it from reaching this state, and the necessity for its conversion. The basic script can be rehearsed in different narrative contexts, and sometimes the basic storyline is repeated several times within one text alone.

1. Philosophical Antecedents

Some elements in the 'script' underlying different kinds of early Christian stories of the soul may seem intuitive—such as the notion of the soul's movement up and down—but most of them are culturally conditioned. The metaphors Plato used in his dialogues to illustrate the soul's condition set the scene for subsequent discussions on this issue; stories of the soul in Nag Hammadi texts are no exception.

Considerable variation in Plato's different accounts of the soul suggests that his point in discussing this issue was ethical rather than doctrinal. The ethical aspects of his views about the soul become especially clear in his simpler accounts of the soul in *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*.[9]

The picture Plato paints in *Phaedo* of what the soul should do is quite plain. The soul should turn inwards (83a) and devote itself to intellectual reflection concerning things divine. This activity makes the soul lighter and thus gradually enables its ascent to the divine realm. In company with the gods, the soul becomes 'happy, and free from error, lack of understanding, fear, all-consuming

Psychological Context of Earliest Christian Literacy', *Myths, Martyrs, and Modernity: Studies in the History of Religions in Honour of Jan N. Bremmer* (ed. J. Dijkstra, J. Kroesen, and Y. Kuiper; Leiden: Brill, 2010) 426–41.

9 It goes without saying that Plato's other dialogues, most prominently *Timaeus*, contain a large number of passages which are also reflected in some of the texts to be discussed below, especially in the *Secret Book of John*; I will add references to these other dialogues in the course of my analysis below. For most comprehensive surveys of allusions to Plato's dialogues in Sethian texts, see John D. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition* (BCNHÉ 6; Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2001); Karen L. King, *The Secret Revelation of John* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2006) 191–214. For a recent analysis of the Platonic ingredient in the *Gospel of Thomas*, see Stephen J. Patterson, 'Jesus Meets Plato: The Theology of the *Gospel of Thomas* and Middle Platonism', *Das Thomasevangelium: Entstehung—Rezeption—Theologie* (ed. Jörg Frey, Enno Edzard Popkes, and Jens Schröter; BZNW 157; Berlin: de Gruyter 2008) 181–205: '*Thomas*' distinctive voice, which I have at times called "Gnostic" or "Gnosticizing", and at other times, more vaguely, "esoteric", can be characterized more precisely as Platonic' (183). For a similar shift from a Gnostic to a Platonic interpretation in the study of the *Book of Thomas* (NHC II, 7), see John D. Turner, 'The Book of Thomas and the Platonic Jesus', *L'Évangile Selon Thomas et les textes de Nag Hammadi* (ed. Louis Painchaud and Paul-Hubert Poirier; BCNHÉ 8; Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2007) 599–633.

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love' (80e). Attachment to the body, in contrast, weighs the soul down since the body is 'burdensome, heavy, earthly and visible' (81c). Grave misconduct—'gluttony, debauchery, and drinking'—makes the soul so heavy that it will enter an animal's body in its next reincarnation (81e). It follows that the soul should seek to escape the body. In this way, it 'departs pure, dragging with it nothing of the body' (80e).

In *Phaedrus*, the core narrative is similar to that in *Phaedo*: the soul committed to seeking the vision of the divine becomes lighter and ascends, whereas the soul clinging to visible things becomes heavy and falls down. In *Phaedrus*, however, Plato offers a more detailed account of the stages the soul must go through on its way up. The soul focused on the divine is 'free from harm until the next cycle'. The soul can repeat its success time and again, but lapses are always possible: 'it may happen' that even a progressing soul 'is filled with forgetfulness (λήθη) and evil (κακία)', becomes heavy, loses its wings, and 'falls to the earth' (ἐπὶ τὴν γὴν πέσῃ).[10] Failure in one cycle, however, does not entail full degradation; it only takes the soul one step down in the next reincarnation.[11] Progress and degradation are possible in each reincarnation: 'Now in all these states, one who lives justly (ὃς…ἂν δικαίως διαγάγῃ) obtains a better lot, while one living unjustly receives a worse one' (248e). One either progresses or slips back. Therefore, one must constantly aim at moral improvement.[12]

Plato used stories of the soul as an invitation to a philosophical way of life,[13] which he promoted as a bargain: 'doing philosophy without guile' reduces the time needed for the soul's release from the cycle of incarnations by 7000 years (from 10,000 to 3000).[14] In addition, it is at the philosopher stage that the soul

10 *Phaedr.* 248d. Plato's image of the soul's loss of its wings became persistent among later interpreters of different bents; cf., e.g., Plutarch *Virt. prof.* 77b; Plotinus *Enneads* 4.8.1; Tatian *Graec.* 13–14: 'When one becomes obedient to Wisdom', God's spirit draws near and makes the soul immortal, 'giving it wings with which to fly heavenward to God' (cf. Patterson, 'Jesus', 188); *Book Thom.* 140 (cf. Turner, 'The Book of Thomas', 612–17).

11 Plato portrays a hierarchy of no fewer than nine classes of people where the soul can end up before it is downgraded into the bodies of animals (*Phaedr.* 248c-e: [1] philosopher; lover of beauty; a musical or loving person; [2] lawful king; warlike ruler; [3] politician; merchant; financier; [4] gymnast; medical doctor; [5] prophet; leader of mystic rites; [6] poet; artist; [7] craftsman; farmer; [8] sophist; demagogue; [9] tyrant). In *Timaeus*, Plato infamously lists only three stages: men, women, and animals (42bc).

12 Cf. *Phaedo* 84a: it is not acceptable that the philosopher's soul is first made free, and then it slips back into 'delight and distress' (ἡδοναῖς καὶ λήθαις).

13 For a similar emphasis in Plutarch's works, see now Lieve van Hoof, *Plutarch's Practical Ethics: The Social Dynamics of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2010) 22–3.

14 This looks like a tongue-in-cheek argument. The comments Socrates makes later in *Phaedrus* (265b–266a) on his narrative illustrations of the soul's origin and goal should caution us against taking too literally any of the stories Plato uses to make his teaching more accessible. (I owe this remark to Tua Korhonen.)

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is again supplied with its wings, which it had lost on its way down. These wings are needed for the soul's ascent to, and recollection of, divine reality.[15]

More immediate gains in living the life of a philosopher are that it brings about freedom from emotions, and removes the fear of death. Plato considered emotions the most pernicious evil since the soul is attached to the body through them. Emotions dupe the soul into believing that their objects are 'most splendid and true'.[16] In other words, the soul deceived by emotions accepts as truth what the body claims to be true. Reliance on wrong messages sent by bodily senses deceives the soul, making it 'confused and dizzy like a drunk'.[17]

The bad habits the deceived soul develops in this life keep it in the cycle of reincarnation, because this soul is so fond of the body that it seeks to find a new one as quickly as possible.[18] Accordingly, 'the true philosopher' steers away from delight, desire, distress, and fear.[19] The method is contemplation of the divine things, which 'brings about calm' in the storm of emotions. Consequently, a person in the know is no longer afraid of the destruction of his soul at death since his soul will continue doing what it already started on earth, that is, contemplating divine things. The only difference is that the soul is now 'released from human calamities'.[20]

After Plato, emotions became subject to intensive scrutiny in moral philosophy.[21] Particularly, Stoic philosophers developed subtle categorizations, in which dozens of emotions were grouped under the four emotions already mentioned by Plato.[22] Like Plato, the Stoics viewed emotions as based upon faulty reasoning that attaches value to external things. The control of emotions, thus, became a major issue in the philosophers' discussions about moral progress.

15 *Phaedr.* 249a, 249c.

16 *Phaedo* 83.

17 *Phaedo* 79c.

18 *Phaedo* 83c-e; cf. Ingvil Sælid Gilhus, *Animals, Gods, and Humans: Changing Attitudes to Animals in Greek, Roman, and Early Christian Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2006) 86–7. The soul's love of the body is one of the explanations for its fall mentioned in Albinus, *Didask.* 25; other possible reasons he discusses are 'the will of God', and 'wantoness'; cf. John Dillon, 'The Descent of the Soul in Middle Platonic and Gnostic Theory', *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism* (ed. Bentley Layton; 2 vols.; SHR 41; Leiden: Brill, 1981) 1.357–64.

19 *Phaedo* 83b.

20 *Phaedo* 84a-b.

21 This aspect of ancient philosophy has become subject to intense scholarship in recent years; cf., e.g., Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1994); Simo Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2004); for a concise introduction to this theme, see now John T. Fitzgerald, 'The Passions and Moral Progress: An Introduction', *Passions and Moral Progress* (ed. Fitzgerald) 1–25.

22 For a synoptic comparison of the main sources of the Stoic classification of emotions, see Onuki, *Gnosis und Stoa*, 35–8.

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Obnoxious emotions became designated as the sickness of the soul, with the philosopher as the physician offering the cure: a person entangled with emotions could be cured by identifying and correcting the wrong thought patterns underlying them.[23] In theory, it was debated whether the goal should be complete extirpation of emotions (*apatheia*) or their moderation (*metriopatheia*), but in practice most parties agreed that the latter is the only viable option for most humans.[24]

2. *Authoritative Discourse* (NHC VI, 3)

In addition to the fact that the *Authoritative Discourse* does not present itself as an exoteric text, as was mentioned above, the present context of this text in Nag Hammadi Codex VI offers little support for a 'Gnostic' reading of this text. The demiurgical myth assumes a very marginal role in this codex: there is only one passage in the entire codex referring to a distinction between the true God and an inferior creator-God.[25]

The selection of texts in Nag Hammadi Codex VI is especially puzzling since it contains both more or less openly Christian texts[26] and works that are clearly of non-Christian origin, including Plato's *Republic* and some Hermetic texts.[27] One of the recurring features in different tractates of this codex, however, is the healing of the soul. Concern for the soul's sickness and healing, thus, is one of the common themes that may explain why these diverse texts were put together.[28]

In the *Authoritative Discourse*, 'word' is described as 'a medicine', applied on, and healing, the soul's blind eyes.[29] In the opening tractate, the *Acts of Peter and*

23 Nussbaum (*The Therapy of Desire*) has been essential in demonstrating the importance of the soul's healing in all ancient schools of philosophy.

24 Cf. Troels Engberg-Pedersen, 'The Concept of Paraenesis', *Early Christian Paraenesis in Context* (ed. James M. Starr and Troels Engberg-Pedersen; BZNW 125; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004) 47–72, esp. 54–9.

25 *Perf. Disc.* 75–76. The distinction between the creator-God Zeus and 'the one who truly is' is made clearer in this version than in the parallel text preserved in *Asclepius* (27).

26 To this group belong at least the *Acts of Peter and 12 Apostles*, the *Authoritative Discourse* and the *Concept of Our Great Power*.

27 It would seem that *Thunder*, in which a divine revealer is introduced by using the same style of 'I am'-sayings as one finds in Isis aretalogies, could be placed in this group. Nevertheless, this text also draws upon Jewish sapiental traditions; thus, most recently, Tilde Bak Halvgaard, 'Linguistic Manifestations of Divine Thought: An Investigation of the Use of Stoic and Platonic Dialetics in the Trimorphic Protennoia (NHC XIII, 1) and the Thunder: Perfect Mind (NHC VI, 2)' (Ph.D. diss., University of Copenhagen, 2012) 115–17.

28 Cf. Michael A. Williams and Lance Jenott, 'Inside the Covers of Codex VI', *Coptica—Gnostica—Manichaiaca: Mélanges offerts à Wolf-Peter Funk* (ed. Louis Painchaud and Paul-Hubert Poirier; BCNHÉ 7; Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2006) 1025–52; see also Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism'*, 257–9.

29 *Auth. Disc.* 22, 27–28.

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12 Disciples, Christ not only appears to his disciples in 'the form of a doctor with a medicine bag', but he also gives this bag to his disciples, urging them to 'heal all the people of the city who are sick and believe in my name'.[30] The disciples are commissioned to heal both body and soul, but what really matters is the cure they offer to the soul: 'the doctors of this world heal what is of the world, but the doctors of souls heal the heart'. Healing of the body is only of instrumental value:[31] its purpose is to convince people that the disciples 'also have the power to heal sicknesses of the heart'.[32] The final text in the codex, an excerpt from the Hermetic *Perfect Discourse*, also emphasizes the necessity of healing the emotions: 'Knowledge of what is right is truly healing for the passions of material existence... God has perfected learning and knowledge...so that by means of learning and knowledge (human beings) might restrain passions and vices'.[33]

The story of the soul's plight and rescue in the *Authoritative Discourse* follows in essence the two-way pattern set in Plato's dialogues:[34]

1) The soul's descent: the spiritual soul is 'cast down into a body', becomes subject to emotions,[35] and succumbs to wine-drinking, debauchery, and gluttony. These things cause the soul's memory loss concerning the things divine: 'The soul forgets her siblings and her father, and sweet pleasures deceive her'. While Plato taught that the soul filled with evil will end up in an

30 For the healing metaphor used in this text, see Andrea Lorenzo Molinari, *The Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles (NHC 6.1): Allegory, Ascent, and Ministry in the Wake of the Decian Persecution* (SBLDS 174; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000) 214–29.

31 At this point, my understanding of the text differs from Molinari's. He maintains that the healing of the body and that of the soul are of equal importance in this text. This interpretation is essential to his claim that *Acts* can be dated to the Decian persecution: 'The two types of healing by our text (body and soul) may refer to the community's task in the wake of the Decian persecution: (1) caring for the sick...and (2) healing the hearts of those who apostasized' (226). As far as I can see, the text contains no clear references to persecution, nor to apostasy. The theme of healing is too universal to qualify as a proof for this setting.

32 *Acts Pet. 12 Ap.* 8, 10–11.

33 *Perf. Disc.* 66, 67. The idea of healing of emotions is more emphatically present in the Nag Hammadi version of the *Perfect Discourse* than in the parallel of this passage in *Asclepius* 22. The latter speaks of 'vices' instead of 'passions'. Nevertheless, healing is also referred to in *Asclepius*: 'Scorn for the vices—and *a cure for those vices*—comes from understanding the divine plan upon which all things have been based... Tainted and corrupted by (the vices), the soul grows inflamed as if poisoned—except the souls of those who have the sovereign *remedy* of learning and understanding' (trans. Brian Copenhaver, emphasis added).

34 In his seminal study on *Auth. Disc.* (above n. 5), van den Broek traces a number of close contacts between this text and Middle Platonist teachings. His observations are mainly related to terminological affinities in cosmology and anthropology, while he pays less attention to the ethical aspects, which are in focus in my analysis.

35 For emotions in *Auth. Disc.*, see also Scholten, *Martyrium und Sophiamythos*, 120–5.

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animal's body in the next cycle, this text teaches 'realized reincarnation': the deceived soul lives an 'animal life' already in the here and now (23–24).

2) The ascent: the soul 'flees upwards' from its 'enemies' (28)—which probably can be identified with the 'fleeting sweet passions' the soul is said to abandon (31). Rehearsing the Platonic ideal, the people adopting this lifestyle are no longer attached to 'created things' but their hearts are focused on 'what truly is' (27). Accordingly, the enlightened soul renounces its attachment to this world and to the body: 'The soul returned the body to those who had given it to her' (32). This may point to the separation of soul and body at death, yet the new attitude towards the body means hard times for the soul already in this life since those who have adopted this lifestyle wander in this world hungry, thirsty, sick, weak and in pain (27).

The author of this text not only speaks of 'desire (ⲉⲡⲓⲑⲩⲙⲓⲁ), hatred (ⲙⲟⲥⲧⲉ) and envy (ⲕⲱϩ)' on a general level.[36] The transformation of the spiritual soul into a 'material soul' (ⲯⲩⲭⲏ ⲛ̄ϩⲩⲗⲓⲕⲏ) also means that the soul is attached to 'external companions' (ⲛ̄ϣⲣ ⲙ̄ⲡⲟⲗ), comprising 'grand passions, the pleasures of life, envy filled with hatred, bragging, talking nonsense, accusations'.[37] The author is even more graphic in condemning 'the desire for a piece of clothing (ⲧⲉⲡⲓⲑⲩⲙⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩϣⲧⲏⲛ)', and a number of other similar things: 'love of money, pride, arrogance, one kind of envy being envious of another kind of envy, bodily beauty, leading people astray'.[38] Wine and food are also an issue: the author regards wine as the source of debauchery,[39] and warns against gluttony.[40] In addition, food is one of the metaphors illustrating the devil's attempts to misguide people.[41]

The descriptions of the errors of the soul succumbing to matter may be understood as being directed against other Christians who, in his view, have adopted an erroneous lifestyle. For the author expresses strong disapproval of some people whom he considers fools, and who are not seeking God; these ignoramuses are most likely wrong kinds of Christian since the author deems them to be worse than 'pagans' (33).[42]

36 *Auth. Disc.* 23.15–16.
37 *Auth. Disc.* 23.29–34.
38 *Auth. Disc.* 30.34–31.5.
39 *Auth. Disc.* 24.14–16.
40 *Auth. Disc.* 25.9–10.
41 This usage is prominent in the passage based upon fishing metaphors (including fish, baits, hook, and good-smelling food) in *Auth. Disc.* 29–31; cf. Tervahauta, 'A Story of the Soul's Journey', Ch. 6.1.2.
42 Tervahauta's detailed reading of this passage suggests that the author is here in fact critical of two different kinds of Christian, that is, the ignorant ones who 'do not take their quest seriously enough and aim at hindering others', and the foolish ones, 'who are too lazy to make a serious effort in worship and lifestyle'; cf. Ulla Tervahauta, 'Criticism of the Ignorant People, Foolish Persons and Pagans in Authentikos Logos (NHC VI,3): A Case-Study of Intra-Christian Polemic

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The wrong lifestyle described in the text is no doubt a thing to be avoided. Nevertheless, there is little room for explicit moral exhortation in this text. One is either in the know or outside it. The 'fools' seem to have no hope of moral improvement. Their ascent is not only hindered by ignorance but also by 'the demon of deception' (ⲡⲇⲁⲓⲙⲱⲛ ⲛ̄ⲧⲡⲗⲁⲛⲏ). At this point, however, the text sends a mixed message since the author is also confident that the knowledge of what is evil is sufficient to bring about change for the better: it is this knowledge that makes the soul adopt 'a new kind of conduct' (ⲟⲩⲡⲟⲗⲓⲧⲉⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲃ̄ⲣ̄ⲣ̄ⲉ) (31).

The way the soul's story is told in the *Authoritative Discourse* leans mainly on Platonic tradition, but it also offers a glimpse of a demiurgical myth in one passage: the 'merchants of body' (ⲙ̄ⲡⲣⲁⲅⲙⲁⲧⲉⲩⲧⲏⲥ ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲥⲱⲙⲁ),[43] to whom the soul returns its body, are described in the same way as are the angels responsible for the creation of Adam's body in demiurgical sources: they created the body in order to 'bring down' the soul, and yet they were unaware that it already had 'an invisible spiritual body' (32–33).[44] This one passage does not make the whole text a demiurgical one, but it shows that the demiurgical myth belonged to the pool of traditions from which the author drew inspiration for his own account of the soul.[45]

3. The *Exegesis on the Soul* (NHC II, 6)

The *Exegesis on the Soul* is placed in Nag Hammadi Codex II, which is more demiurgical in its outlook than Codex VI: demiurgical myths are related in three of its seven tractates, and one additional text, the *Gospel of Philip*, mentions the ignorant creator-god in passing (NHC II, 75). Nevertheless, there are also three nondemiurgical texts in this codex. In addition, the arrangement of texts may suggest that the demiurgical myth was not the major issue even in this codex. There is no development of argument from nondemiurgical works to demiurgical ones, or vice versa.[46] The codex opens with a demiurgical text (*Secret John*), but

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and Portrayal of the Other from the Nag Hammadi Library' (a paper read at the 2011 EABS International Meeting, Thessaloniki, 8–11 August 2011).

43 As Tervahauta ('A Story of the Soul's Journey', Ch. 6.2.1) details, this unusual phrase can be understood as referring to slave traders.

44 Tervahauta ('A Story of the Soul's Journey', Ch. 6.2.1) points out that, while this term is unique in the Nag Hammadi Library, close analogies to it can be found in Clement (*Strom.* 7.14; *Exc. Theod.* 14) and Origen (*Cels.* 4.57). Tervahauta maintains that the invisible spiritual body should be understood as 'a go-between that enables the ascent of the immaterial soul after it discards its material body'.

45 Cf. Tervahauta, 'A Story of the Soul's Journey', Ch. 6.2.1.

46 Cf. Jutta Leonhardt-Balzer, 'On the Redactional and Theological Relationship between the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Apocryphon of John*', *Das Thomasevangelium* (ed. Frey et al.)

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closes with two nondemiurgical texts (*Exegesis on the Soul*; *Book of Thomas*). In addition, the three demiurgical texts are not grouped together, but two nondemiurgical texts are placed between *Secret John* and *Rulers*.[47] It seems that whoever put these texts together did *not* do that in an attempt to create a unified demiurgical corpus, which would serve as a foundation, in light of which the other texts should be interpreted.

What brings all these three texts together is, again, concern for the soul. The first and last texts even contain similar discussions between Jesus and his disciples about the fates of different kinds of soul.[48] In addition, the emphasis placed upon the mastery of emotions in *Secret John* may be one of the reasons why this text was placed at the beginning of Codex II.[49]

In the *Exegesis on the Soul*, explicit sexual imagery is used to illustrate the soul's plight in the body. *Porneia* is one of the key metaphors in the text. Alluding to explicit language used in the book of Ezekiel (ch. 16) to portray Jerusalem's unholy alliances with the nations, the author of *Exegesis* describes the soul as playing the whore (ⲁⲥⲡⲟⲣⲛⲉⲩⲉ) and sleeping with everyone it meets (128; cf. Ezek 16.25, 32). In keeping with this imagery, the soul's inner enemies are described as 'adulterers', and the soul as seeking, and finally finding, its true husband: at a later point of the story God sends the soul from above its male counterpart (ⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲥϩⲟⲟⲩⲧ), also described as its 'brother' (ⲥⲟⲛ) and 'bridegroom' (ⲣⲙ̄ϣⲉⲗⲉⲉⲧ) (132). This implies that the soul, which was originally androgynous, did not fall down completely: its other half remained with God, and can now be reunited with the fallen part.[50]

251–71: 'There appears to be a double arrangement cosmology—human life; cosmology—human life' (255). Leonhardt-Balzer also points out that, in comparison with the other representative of the long version of *Secret John* in Codex IV, there is added 'interest in the application of the myth' in the Codex II version of this text (262).

47 The arrangement of the two latter demiurgical texts, *Rulers* and *Origin*, next to each other implies a special sense of their belonging together, which quickly comes to mind in light of a number of close affinities between them; large parts of *Origin* can be read like an expanded version of the story told in *Rulers*.

48 *Secr. John* II 25–26; *Book Thom.* 142–43. Khosroyev leaves such thematic connections unmentioned when he suggests that the *Book of Thomas* was included in Codex II simply because it was of the right length to be fitted into the remaining final pages of the codex; cf. Khosroyev, *Die Bibliothek von Nag Hammadi*, 14–15.

49 Thus Eduard Iricinschi, 'The Scribes and Readers of Nag Hammadi Codex II: Book Production and Monastic *Paideia* in Fourth-Century Egypt' (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2009) 163 (cf. also 203). (I am grateful to Dr Iricinschi for providing me with a copy of his exceptionally well-argued and informative doctoral thesis.)

50 For the Christian usage of kinship language to denote the soul's true origin, see also Tatian *Graec.* 13.2 (συζυγία); 20.2–3 (συγγένεια); both terms express the need for the soul's reunion with the spirit; cf. David M. Reis, 'Thinking with Soul: Psychē and Psychikos in the

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This text describes the soul's descent in a Platonic fashion: the soul 'fell down into the body', where it ended up in the hands of 'many robbers' (ⲛ̄ϩⲁϩ ⲛ̄ⲗⲏⲥⲧⲏⲥ) and 'unruly men' (ⲛ̄ϩⲩⲃⲣⲓⲥⲧⲏⲥ). The latter term recalls, most likely intentionally, 'the unruly horse' in Plato. Plato used this term to illustrate the desiring part of the soul, which the charioteer must train to obedience by restraining it by force time and time again.[51]

This allusion is one of the many indications that what is at stake here in *Exegesis* is the poor state of affairs *within* the soul prior to its conversion: the robbers and unruly men are powers active inside the soul. Also in keeping with the Platonic tradition, the soul is described as suffering from memory loss, this time combined with the notion of the soul's bridegroom: 'She did not know what he looked like, she no longer remembers since the time she fell from her father's house' (132).

The soul's ascent is mentioned in *Exegesis*, but this is only one of the many ways of describing the soul's restitution; other descriptions include resurrection, redemption from captivity, and rebirth (134). A clear modification of Plato's two-way pattern is the role God plays in the whole process: the soul, which recognizes its situation, does not immediately ascend to God but God must visit it from above (128).

It almost feels inappropriate to pose the question of the method enabling the soul to ascend since the author so vehemently denies that any exists: neither 'words of training' (ⲛ̄ϣⲁϫⲉ ⲛ̄ⲁⲥⲕⲏⲥⲓⲥ), nor 'skills', nor 'book wisdom' are of any help (134).[52] It all boils down to the mercy God shows in response to true

Construction of Early Christian Identities', *JECS* 17, no. 4 (2009) 563–603, esp. 577–81. The way the soul's story is related in *Exegesis* helps us see similar features in other texts included in Codex II. The bridal imagery looms large both in the *Gospel of Thomas* and in the *Gospel of Philip*. In light of *Exegesis*, the passage in *Philip* describing the attempts of 'ignorant' women and men to mingle with, and defile, the people they see sitting alone (65.3–26) could easily be understood as an allegory of the evil powers threatening the soul from within. Just like the soul is united with its male counterpart in *Exegesis*, in *Philip* the man and wife standing together illustrate the soul's ideal state that makes it immune to the attacks of evil spirits. The subsequent passage in *Philip* steers the discussion to one's mastery over emotions—desire, fear, envy are specifically mentioned—and then the discussion again turns to the threats posed by unclean spirits and demons. This combination suggests that emotions are *the* method the demons use in trying to affix the soul to the 'flesh'. In addition, it is affirmed in this passage that the soul cannot resist the demons on its own but must be aided by the Spirit: 'If they had the holy spirit, no clean spirit would cleave to them' (*Gos. Phil.* 64–5). This affirmation also suggests that the previous description of a married couple standing strong against adulterers should be understood as a metaphor for the soul joined with the divine spirit.

51 *Phaedr.* 254b-e. In *Republic* 588–89, this unruly horse is identified with desire (ἐπιθυμία); cf. Gilhus, *Animals, Gods, and Humans*, 205.

52 The negative stance towards books this passage betrays is somewhat unexpected in Nag Hammadi Codex II, where positive value is often attached to other books; for a detailed

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repentance,[53] demonstrated by sighing, weeping, confession of sins, 'mourning for ourselves', and 'hating ourselves because of our condition' (135). The author has no qualms about emotions shown for the right reasons: 'Repentance takes place in distress (ⲗⲩⲡⲏ) and the pain of heart (ⲙ̄ⲕⲁϩ ⲛ̄ϩⲏⲧ)'.

Rituals seem to play little role in the soul's conversion according to this text. The author's view of baptism is a fully spiritualized one. The author is emphatic that it is the soul's return to its original nature that should be regarded as the true baptism,[54] taking place when the soul 'turns inwards' and becomes 'cleansed of external pollution' (131–32).

Although the author quotes and interprets biblical passages referring to prostitution, illicit sex is not a primary moral concern in this text.[55] It is made very clear that the *porneia* the author speaks about should not be understood literally but metaphorically. The author emphasizes that, in prohibiting visits to prostitutes in 1 Corinthians, Paul 'was not only speaking of the fornication of the body, but *first and foremost* (ⲛ̄ϩⲟⲟⲩⲟ) of that pertaining to the soul'.

Leaning on Eph 6.12, the author maintains that the real battle the soul must wage is that against 'the cosmic rulers of this darkness and the spirits of wickedness' (130–31). The reference in Ezek 16.26 to 'the sons of Egypt, …men of great flesh' is explained, not as denoting sexual desire, as one could expect, but as referring to all 'things related to flesh, sensual perception, and earth, by which the soul is defiled'.

Strikingly, sex is not included in the author's list of earthly matters at all; the items that are mentioned are 'wine, olive oil, clothing, and other kinds of external

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analysis of the 'bookish' orientation in this codex, see Iricinschi, 'The Scribes and Readers of Nag Hammadi Codex II', 99–113.

53 Cf. Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 132–4. The importance of God's mercy in this text is correctly emphasized by Aland, *Was ist Gnosis*, 41, yet I believe she does not sufficiently emphasize the importance of a person's repentance as evoking this mercy. Tervahauta ('A Story of the Soul's Journey', Ch. 1.3) sees here a crucial difference between *Exeg. Soul* and *Auth. Disc.*: the latter 'puts more emphasis on the soul's progress, whereas in the *Exegesis on the Soul*, repentance and the aid received from the heavenly father or bridegroom is more emphatic'.

54 Cf. Frederik Wisse, 'On Exegeting "the Exegesis of the Soul"', *Les Textes de Nag Hammadi* (ed. J.-É Ménard; NHS 7; Leiden: Brill, 1975) 68–81, esp. 79; Guy G. Stroumsa, *Barbarian Philosophy: The Religious Revolution of Early Christianity* (WUNT 112; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999) 274; *pace* Kulawik (*Die Erzählung über die Seele*, 169), who assumes that the reference to baptism at this point is to that with water; for a carefully nuanced discussion also pointing in this direction, see Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 94–5, 128–9. In my opinion, the text's concern with purity does not necessarily imply the importance of a baptismal ritual for the soul's ascent. As Kulawik (166) points out, Plato already emphasized the soul's purity (e.g. *Phaed.* 67), which he defined in intellectual rather than ritual terms. Plato also linked together the ideas of the soul's purity and the soul's turning inside; cf. Erwin Rohde, *Psyche: Seelenkult und Unsterblichkeitsglaube bei den Griechen* (2 vols.; Freiburg, 2d ed. 1898 [repr. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991]) 2.282–9.

55 Cf. Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth*, 84–6.

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follies used to cover the body, these things that the soul thinks it needs' (130). Biblical and philosophical traditions shake hands again: most items mentioned here are drawn from the portrayal of the lewd Jerusalem in Ezekiel 16 (esp. vv. 15–22), but the point made with them is unmistakably philosophical: it is the soul's erroneous value judgement that glues it to the visible things.

4. *The Secret Book of John* (NHC II, 1)[56]

The soul is a major theme in the second main part of *The Secret Book of John*, which offers an elaborate account of the creation of humankind, based upon a radical rewriting of the first chapters of Genesis.

Unlike in Plato, the soul itself is not the link connecting human beings to the divine realm in *Secret John*. The soul was produced by inferior 'angels and demons', involved in Adam's creation. They first created a body consisting only of the soul (ⲯⲩⲭⲓⲕⲟⲛ ⲛ̄ⲥⲱⲙⲁ) for Adam,[57] but this proved a failure: this creature 'remained completely inactive and motionless' (II, 19). This is another deviation from Plato, who described the soul as invisibly moving the body.[58] What made the 'body consisting of soul' stand up and move, according to *Secret John*, is the divine spirit, transmitted to the soul when the creator-god Yaldabaoth 'blew into its face'.[59] The presence of the divine spirit also made the soul 'radiant', 'naked as regards evil', superior in thinking—and the subject of its creators' envy (II, 19–20).

The events in the subsequent story are narrative variations on one theme: the soul is sent into a downward movement by the cosmic rulers, and yet, at each new stage of its descent, it is provided with a divine instructor that shows the way back. The instructor's teaching is summarized in a Platonic fashion: it teaches Adam's soul 'about the descent of his offspring and about the way of ascent (which is) the way it came down' (II, 20). Adam is here clearly a paradigmatic character, as is

56 My comments on this text are based upon the long version available in NHC II. The very fragmentary version of this text in NHC IV, 1 stands close to that in NHC II, whereas considerably shorter versions are offered in two other available manuscripts including this text (NHC III, 1; BG 8502, 2).

57 As van den Broek (*Studies in Gnosticism and Alexandrian Christianity*, 74–7) demonstrates, *Secret John's* detailed account of different powers contributing to the creation of Adam's *soul* follows very closely Plato's account of the composition of the human *body* in *Timaeus* 73b–76e.

58 *Phaedr.* 245c–246a, 246c; for the importance of this idea for Plato's view of the soul, see Michael Davis, *The Soul of the Greeks: An Inquiry* (Chicago: Chicago University, 2012) 194–5. Plato offers a more 'pessimistic' version of the same idea in *Timaeus*, where it is described how the body moved by the soul staggers, so training is needed to make this human being 'sound and faultless' (44b-c); cf. Patterson, 'Jesus', 202–3.

59 'Standing up' is a crucial detail since the erect posture differentiates humans from animals: 'Man is the only animal that stands upright, and this is because his nature and essence are divine' (Aristotle *Parts of Animals* 686a; cf. Gilhus, *Animals, Gods, and Humans*, 38–9).

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demonstrated by the account of the divine Providence concluding the long version of *Secret John*: this character offers similar instruction to a human being awakened from the state of ignorance (II, 30–31).[60]

The subsequent stages in *Secret John's* account of Adam's creation illustrate, in the form of mythic narration, the obstacles preventing the soul's ascent. The text taps into well-established Platonic imagery, not only in describing how the creator angels created a body of flesh for Adam out of fire, earth, and water (II, 20–21), but also in describing this body as 'the tomb' and 'fetter of forgetfulness' (II, 21).[61]

A crucial juncture in the story is the introduction of the excessive desire for procreation (ⲟⲩⲥⲡⲟⲣⲁ ⲛ̄ⲉⲡⲓⲑⲩⲙⲓⲁ) and sexual intercourse (ⲧⲥⲩⲛⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ), by which means Yaldabaoth succeeds in lulling humankind into the state of forgetfulness (II, 24–25). Nevertheless, even sexual desire did not completely work in the way Yaldabaoth wanted. The ensuing account of how Adam 'knew the likeness of his own foreknowledge' and then begot Seth (*Secr. John* II, 24–25) may imply that sexual intercourse took place between Adam and Eve, and that something good resulted from it.[62]

Sexual desire, thus, is one of the stages in the story of how humankind was cast into darkness, but even this stage did not bring about complete detachment from the divine realm. Hence the need for yet another deception: luxury. The story of the sons of God taking human wives in Genesis 6 reappears in *Secret John* as a story of angels luring humankind with 'gold, silver, gift, copper, iron, metal and all kinds of appearances (ⲅⲉⲛⲟⲥ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲛⲓⲉⲓⲇⲟⲥ)'.[63] This account in *Secret John* is doubtless indebted to a traditional Jewish lore, in which all kinds of crafts, including production of swords, knives, and shields, are ascribed to the fallen sons of God, mentioned in Genesis 6 (*1 En*. 7–8; cf. also Gen 4.22).[64] The

60 This passage also emphasizes that awakening is only possible with the help of divine instruction. Not only is Providence identified with 'the remembrance' of the divine reality, but it also awakens humans 'from the deep sleep', and urges them to be on guard 'against the angels of poverty, the demons of chaos, and all those who ensnare you'.

61 Cf. Plato *Timaeus* 31b, 32b.

62 Cf. Karen L. King, 'Reading Sex and Gender in the *Secret Revelation of John*', *JECS* 19, no. 4 (2011) 519–38, esp. 525–6. It is notable, however, that sexual intercourse between Adam and Eve is not directly mentioned in this passage. Hence it is also possible to understand the text as saying that 'Adam produced Seth, apparently without Eve's help'; thus Iricinschi, 'The Scribes and Readers of Nag Hammadi Codex II', 218.

63 *Secr. John* II 29–30. In their critical edition of the text, Waldstein and Wisse translated ⲛⲓⲉⲓⲇⲟⲥ (29.33) as 'things'; cf. Michael Waldstein and Frederik Wisse, The Apocryphon of John: *Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices* II,*1; and* III,*1; and* IV,*1 with* BG *8502,2* (NHMS 33; Leiden: Brill, 1995). This translation hides what seems to be a deliberate Platonic allusion to the allure of 'visible things'.

64 Cf. Birger A. Pearson, '*1 Enoch* in the *Apocryphon of John*', *Texts and Contexts: Biblical Texts in their Textual and Situational Contexts* (FS Lars Hartman; ed. Tord Fornberg and David Hellholm; Oslo: Scandinavian University, 1995) 355–67, here 363. Pearson remains puzzled

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author of *Secret John* retells the story in a way that leaves no doubt that his point is not so much aetiological as it is ethical: the traditional story turns into one in which the evil angels dupe humans 'into great trouble' with luxury metals.[65] *Secret John*'s version of the story, thus, lends itself to a Platonic interpretation: the luxury items are, or illustrate, one way in which the world of appearances distracts the soul from what really matters, that is, 'the true God'.[66]

Control of emotions is an important aspect in the soul's battle against the demons, although this theme is not systematically worked out in *Secret John*. In one passage, contained only in the long version, four basic emotions (distress, delight, desire, and fear) are ascribed to a gang of four chief demons. The listing of subcategories of emotions, arranged under each of the four main ones, betrays an academic interest in the topic since this passage closely follows a fixed Stoic classification of emotions.[67]

The meticulous Stoic classification of emotions, however, remains an oddly isolated piece of tradition since this passage is not called upon later in the story. One later passage, however, shows that *Secret John* subscribes to the Stoic ideal of *apatheia*. In the description of the perfect souls, the most concrete indication of their advanced status is their freedom from emotions, including anger (ⲟⲣⲅⲏ), envy (ⲕⲱϩ), jealousy (ⲫⲑⲟⲛⲟⲥ), desire (ⲉⲡⲓⲑⲩⲙⲓⲁ), and their 'lack of unsatisfied needs' (ⲧⲙ̄ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲧⲥⲓ) (II, 25). This latter listing of emotions is probably more original in *Secret John* since it is also included in the two short versions of the text, while the fourfold classification in the earlier part is only present in the long version of the text. In any case, in the long version of *Secret John*, the link drawn between the emotions listed in this latter passage and the earlier listing of the four primeval demons responsible for them is clear. Control of emotions is in this version identified as *the* method by which the soul wages war against the demons.

In addition to the perfect souls, *Secret John* also mentions (1) less advanced people who can become endowed with the spirit, but are still in danger of succumbing to 'the counterfeit spirit', and (2) the deceived souls, which end up in new cycles of reincarnation.[68] These poor souls are described in terms derived

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'why this detail is found in *Ap. John*'; a full recognition of this text's ethical concern, going back to a longstanding philosophical tradition, probably offers the answer.

65 Cf. King, *The Secret Revelation of John*, 109.

66 Cf. Plato *Republic* 9.579: the soul's most inferior part (*epithumia*) seeks money and pleasures and the 'willing' middle part seeks honor, whereas the rational part seeks knowledge.

67 Cf. Michel Tardieu, *Codex de Berlin* (Ecrits Gnostiques 1; Paris: Cerf, 1984) 313–16; Onuki, *Gnosis und Stoa*, 30–46. The author of this passage in the long version of *Secret John* implies that the classification comes from a literary source, identified as the *Book of Zoroaster*.

68 Reincarnation is *not* a distinctly Gnostic idea in early Christian literature; as Gilhus (*Animals, Gods, and Humans*, 89) points out, Origen also flirted with this idea.

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from Platonic tradition: the wrong spirit makes them 'heavy' and draws them towards 'the works of evil'. The soul belonging to this latter group is thus bound to reenact the same events that Adam went through in the mythic past, until it finally 'awakens from forgetfulness and acquires knowledge'.[69] The only group for whom there is no hope of salvation whatsoever are apostates: those 'who knew and turned away' will be taken to a 'place where there is no repentance' (II, 26–27).

5. Two Other Demiurgical Texts in Nag Hammadi Codex II

The myths narrated in *The Nature of the Rulers* (NHC II, 4) and *On the Origin of the World* (NHC II, 5) resemble closely that related in *Secret John*.[70] The powers involved in the creation of the first humans are as much characterized by unruly sexual desire as they are in *Secret John*. Just like in *Secret John*, the object of these powers' desire is Adam's spiritual instructor, who, notably, is in the two texts called his 'physician' (ⲧⲥⲟⲉⲓⲛ).[71] What these two texts add into the mix are new characters, who are, as I seek to argue below, illustrations of the soul's battle against desire.

Rulers runs a story of Norea, described as the fourth child of Adam and Eve, and as one who repels the rulers' sexual advances. She resorts to two methods. The first is that she calls upon her true nature: 'I am from the world above'. The second is prayer: She asks the true God to rescue her from the rulers' hands. The whole episode looks like a narrative dramatization of the soul drawn between earthly and heavenly things, and making the right choice. If one follows this course of interpretation, one can recognize a subtle point made in the form of narrative: Norea's affirmation of her being 'from above' does not yet stop the unruly powers requesting sexual favors from her; it is only after her prayer that they leave her alone.[72] The text, thus, finds value in refreshing the

69 The Platonic metaphors are, again, used here to describe both the soul's poor condition and its salvation.

70 *Nat. Rul.* 88; *Orig. World* 114–15. There are notable differences in details. While in *Secret John* Yaldabaoth transmits the spirit into a body (consisting of soul) by blowing into its face, in *Rulers* Adam receives only a soul at this point (the Spirit descends upon him later), and in *Origin* it is 'Sophia Zoe' who breathes on Adam who had no soul. While in *Secret John* the presence of the divine Spirit in Adam not only mobilizes him but also makes him radiant, in *Origin* the divine breath just barely enables Adam to move: 'He began to crawl on the ground, but he could not stand up'. Even Adam's lowly posture, however, suffices to trigger the powers' agitation and admiration in front of him. The latter difference between *Secret John* and *Origin* suggests that they draw upon the two different Platonic traditions described above: *Secret John* builds upon the *Phaedrus* version, in which the soul simply activates the body, whereas *Origin* follows the *Timaeus* version, according to which the body bestowed with a soul staggers and therefore needs instruction.

71 *Nat. Rul.* 89.16; *Orig. World* 114.10.

72 *Nat. Rul.* 92–93.

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memory of the soul's true origin, but does not consider this sufficient to extinguish the urges issuing from the body; prayer and divine help are also needed to rescue the soul from those urges.

The most important new element in the myth related in both *Rulers* and *Origin* is the story of Yaldabaoth's dethronement and the ensuing conversion and enthronement of his son Sabaoth.[73] This story, just like that of Norea, can be understood as an allegory of the soul making the right choice.

The story in *Rulers* describes Sabaoth as undergoing conversion: he first 'repents' (ⲁϥⲙⲉⲧⲁⲛⲟⲉⲓ), and then 'condemns his father and matter (ⲑⲩⲗⲏ), his mother'. Such details would make little sense, if the point were only to report a change in the cosmic administration, whereas they make perfect sense as illustrating a repenting soul that renounces its attachment to the material world. In *Exegesis* the soul was described as playing the whore, and then repenting. The same storyline finds here a more mythic expression: Sabaoth was one of the lustful powers in his former life, and he now repents. Sabaoth is also described in terms making him similar to Adam: just like Adam, Sabaoth is provided with divine instructors, Wisdom and Life, and they raise him up: they 'took him up over the seventh heaven, below the curtain between what is above and what is below' (95). The story thus reproduces the same two-stage pattern of detachment and ascent as Plato's myth of the soul.[74]

One noteworthy by-product of this story about Sabaoth is that, stripped of his cosmic power, the dethroned creator-god Yaldabaoth can only pester humans with less powerful means—with passions. The brief remark in *Rulers* (96) that Yaldabaoth's envy of Sabaoth brought about death[75] is further elaborated in *Origin* (106–7).[76]

This text also provides a detailed list of the male and female names of death's offspring: 'These are the names of the males: envy, wrath, weeping, roar, grief, loud shouting, sobbing. These are the names of the females: anger, pain, lust, sighs, curses, bitterness, strife.' What is especially striking in this passage is the list of 'male' names, in which five of the seven displays of emotions are related to mourning. The image evoked by these names seems to be that of ritual

73 *Nat. Rul.* 95–96; *Orig. World* 103–106.

74 The ensuing remark on Sabaoth's 'four-faced chariot of cherubim' is certainly based upon Jewish tradition; cf. Francis T. Fallon, *The Enthronement of Sabaoth: Jewish Elements in Gnostic Creation Myths* (NHS 10; Leiden: Brill, 1978) 57–9. Nevertheless, in this particular context describing Sabaoth's ascent, the remark may also evoke the image of the chariot of Zeus, which Plato used in his discussion of the soul's ascent (*Phaedr.* 246e).

75 Crislip compellingly proposes that the sequence from envy to death in the Sabaoth myth goes back to Wis. 2.24 ('through the devil's envy death entered the world'); cf. Andrew Crislip, 'Envy and Anger at the World's Creation and Destruction in the *Treatise without Title "On the Origin of the World"* (NHC II,5)', *VigChr* 65 (2011) 285–310, on 303.

76 The tendency towards narrative expansion is typical of *Origin's* version in comparison to that of *Rulers*; cf. Fallon, *The Enthronement of Sabaoth*, 24, 121.

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lamentation at funerals. The image of ritual lament seems very appropriate here because of its obvious connection to death. In addition, the question of whether one is entitled to display emotions at funerals, and if so, to what extent, was a classic issue of debate among philosophers. Rites of mourning were also controversial among early Christians. As Antigone Samellas details, early Christian leaders systematically sought to tone down what they considered excessive displays of grief by condemning them as theatrical, feminine, barbarian, and ultimately going back to Satan.[77] Although the literary context, in which this issue is referred to in *Origin*, is very different from the texts discussed by Samellas, the author of this text shares the educated persons' disapproval of excessive displays of grief, explaining them as subversion of true masculinity, and as stemming from the true God's adversary.[78]

It is more difficult to tease out from *Origin* a clear idea of what kind of behavior is expected of people of the right persuasion. Humans are divided into the spirit-endowed, soul-endowed and material ones, but no ethical qualities are attached to these groups. The only more practical thing one learns here is that different sorts of baptisms (by spirit, fire, and water) are needed for different groups (122).

If the story of Sabaoth is intended as an illustration of the soul making the right choice, as I have argued, then repentance and avoidance of unruly desire would be self-evident requirements that need not be separately stated. Given the link drawn in this text between emotions and the lesser gods, it stands to reason that the condemnation of these gods 'by blessed spirits' (123) also involves control of emotions, but this is also not spelled out. What is clear is that the author of this text, just like the author of *Exegesis*, does not fully endorse *apatheia* since he approves of one kind of anger, that shown towards the rulers of darkness (121)—a view that links this text with the Peripatetic tradition rather than with the Stoic one.[79]

77 Antigone Samellas, *Death in the Eastern Mediterranean (50–600 A.D.): The Christianization of the East: An Interpretation* (STAC 12; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002) 72–81, concluding: 'The wailing of women belied the promises of Jesus and rendered the consolations of priests redundant. Their mourning was incompatible with the Christian experience of grief, as this was defined by the bishops'. Women were often described as being more prone to excessive display of emotions than men; cf., e.g., Plutarch *Mor.* 113a; 139; for further examples, see Petra von Gemünden, *Affekt und Glaube: Studien zur historischen Psychologie des Frühjudentums und Urchristentums* (NTOA 73; Göttingen: Vandehoeck & Ruprecht, 2009) 139–41.

78 The affinity between the powers and emotions is also illustrated in the description of the powers' sentimental lament over their defeat in *Orig. World* 125–26.

79 An excursus discussing why 'the excessive desire for sexual intercourse' (ⲧⲉⲡⲓⲑⲩⲙⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲧⲥⲩⲛⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ) is aroused by wine drinking, how this desire was triggered by Eros, and how all beings, including 'the first soul', fell in love with this god (*Orig. World* 109–11), probably suggests that this desire is a thing to be avoided, but the text is not very explicit about this either. The only passage in this section containing what looks like a real argument against

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6. Conclusion

The texts I have discussed above show that the story of the soul's descent and ascent can be placed into quite different narrative contexts. There are certain culturally conditioned key elements that simply seem to belong to this story, regardless of the context in which it is placed. (1) It goes without saying that the story provides an occasion for exploring the soul's relationship to the body —with one exception, which is the story of Sabaoth's conversion. However the soul's ascent is described, it always involves detachment from the body and material world. (2) The image of the soul's forgetfulness and the recovery of its memory of its divine origin is reproduced in different ways. (3) Emotions are a recurrent element in these stories. One sign of the sense that they are intrinsic to the soul's story is the amplification of this aspect by expansions that can be detected in the long version of *Secret John*, and in the *Origin of the World*.

The core narrative of the soul's descent and ascent functions like a magnet, drawing to itself new metaphors, some of which become more permanent features and are in turn expanded by means of mythmaking. The idea of a divine instructor or companion, needed as the soul's guide, can be expressed in a number of different ways, most prominently with marital imagery (Adam and 'ur-Eve'; husband and wife; bridal chamber).

The guiding principle in such descriptions is that the soul cannot save itself; it needs help from outside.[80] This view is expressed in different ways: the soul cannot move by itself but must be animated by the divine breath; only the soul

sexual desire is a reference to 'the tree of knowledge', identified as Adam's 'female companion similar to him' (ⲧⲉϥϣⲃⲣ̄ⲉⲓⲛⲉ). Whereas he loved this true companion, he 'condemned and loathed other kinds of copies'. The relevant section (110.29–111.2) is introduced as stemming from the (otherwise unknown) *Holy Book*. The section is part of a larger whole (*Orig. World* 109–11) that may be of Manichaean origin; cf. Takashi Onuki, 'Das Logion 77 des koptischen *Thomasevangeliums* und der gnostische Animismus', *Das Thomasevangelium* (ed. Frey et al.) 294–317, esp. 313–14.

80 The soul's need for help from outside may seem an addition to Plato's description of the soul's ascent, but this aspect does not place the texts discussed here outside Platonic tradition. As Gregory Shaw details, later Platonists were divided over this issue. According to Plotinus, the soul's fall was not complete; a part of it remains stored in the divine reality. Hence the soul's recollection of that reality can be refreshed through intellectual contemplation. Iamblichus assumed a more radical break. Since he taught that the soul fell in its entirety, it follows that the soul has no natural ability to restore the lost connection. Therefore, what is needed for the soul's ascent is divine revelation and participation in rituals, adjusted to the different stages of its return. Cf. Gregory Shaw, 'The Soul's Innate Gnosis of the Gods: Revelation in Iamblichean Theory', *Revelation, Literature, and Community in Late Antiquity* (ed. Philippa Townsend and Moulie Vidas; TSAJ 146; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011) 117–29. In consequence, the emphasis on the need for divine instruction in Nag Hammadi stories of the soul places them, not outside the Platonic spectrum, but at one end of it.

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joined with the spirit can stand strong against the attacks of evil spirits; or the coming together of the soul and spirit makes one able to experience *visio dei*.[81]

It is by no means surprising that the two sets of stories of the soul discussed here did not stand in isolation from each other as regards these issues. It is only to be expected that some articulations of the soul's present plight floated freely from one kind of story to another.

The authors of the texts I have discussed above were not interested in the soul's plight and salvation as theoretical issues only; one can also trace more mundane concerns in these texts. It may come as a surprise that control of sexual desire does not seem to be the greatest moral concern in them. Perhaps the implied audiences of these works had already gained mastery over this issue? However that may be, these audiences' battle against the demons gluing them to the visible world is far from over.[82] The demons are now resorting to less dramatic, and hence more devious means, including seduction by wine, olive oil, fancy clothing, luxury metals, love of money, pride, and arrogance.[83] How alien indeed is the moral landscape painted in these texts from the moral challenges we face today...

81 For this interpretation, based upon a Valentinian eschatological myth preserved in Clement *Exc. Theod.* 63–64, see Ismo Dunderberg, 'Valentinian Theories on Classes of Humankind', *Zugänge zur Gnosis* (ed. Christoph Markschies, forthcoming).

82 For a similar point that becoming free from most tangible passions does not mean that you have conquered all passions, see Seneca *Ep.* 75: there are people who have already become free of some passions, such as sensual desire and avarice, but who are still troubled by some other passions, including fear, ambition, and pain.

83 Most things listed here (except for olive oil) are stock items in early Jewish and Christian moral discourse (which, of course, does not mean that these things didn't matter!). For Clement's teaching on how meat and wine make the soul heavy, dull, and prone to evil thoughts (*Paed.* 2.1.11 etc.), and for his critical remarks on too luxurious lifestyles, see Theresa M. Shaw, *The Burden of Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) 51–2; for similar examples in Evagrius, see David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2006) 52–70. Another body of literature where similar concerns are expressed is the *Testaments of 12 Patriarchs.* The texts included in this collection customarily include warnings against desire, envy, wine, debauchery, greed, and luxury; cf., e.g., *Test. Reuben* 2–6 (promiscuity; insatiability of stomach; strife; flattery and trickery; arrogance; lying; injustice); *Test. Simeon* 3 (deceit; envy; promiscuity); *Test. Levi* 9 (promiscuity); *Test. Judah* 12–18 (excessive wine-drinking; promiscuity; love of money; beautiful women); *Test. Issachar* 4–7 (gold; fancy foods; fine clothes; envy; avarice; excessive wine-drinking; beautiful women); *Test. Dan* 3–4 (anger); *Test. Gad* 3–6 (hatred, slander; arrogance); *Test. Benj.* 5–8 (wealth; hatred; promiscuity). One also finds in this corpus of texts a similar emphasis on repentance as the key moment of moral improvement; e.g., *Test. Sim.* 2.13 (repentance; weeping; prayer); *Test. Gad* 5: 'What it has not learned from human agency, it understands through repentance'.

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