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"Read It Also to the Gentiles": The Displacement and Recasting of the Philosopher in the Vita Antonii[1]

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In his correspondence with the Corinthian community, the Apostle Paul addressed the problem of factionalism, his criticism aimed particularly against a faction of educated members who regarded their knowledge as evidence of social superiority. He countered these types of claims to superiority by proposing a dichotomy of wisdoms—"the wisdom of this world" and "God's wisdom":

> Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.[2]

In the context of Paul's letter, we might consider the "wisdom of this age" generally as the knowledge of human reason, corrupted by its fall into idolatry (cf. Rom. 1), and, more specifically in the context of 1 Corinthians, the learning of the Greek philosophical tradition, *paideia*, the dominant view of reality that formed the social and cultural values of upper-class Greeks.[3] This sort of wisdom (σοφία), Paul asserts, is "foolishness" (μωρία), both in

[1]This article is an elaboration of themes treated in my Brown University doctoral dissertation. Earlier versions were read at the annual meeting of the North American Patristics Society in 2005 and presented to the Boston Area Patristics Group and the newly formed Providence Patristics Group (Brown University/Providence College). Many thanks to everyone who read and commented on this paper. Special gratitude is owed to Peter Brown for his close reading of an early draft.

[2]1 Cor. 2:6–7 (NRSV).

[3]For example, Dale Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), 37, 59–61. Several studies, including some recent ones, have looked closely at Paul's knowledge of Hellenistic philosophy, while others have compared Pauline communities to philosophical communities. For example, Abraham Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1989); Abraham Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophic Tradition of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003); Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2000); Stanley Stowers, "Does Pauline Christianity Resemble a Hellenistic Philosophy?" in Troels Engberg-Pedersen, ed., *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

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the eyes of God and in relation to the "wisdom of God"—that is, the gospel proclamation of the crucified and risen Christ, "who became for us wisdom from God" (1 Cor. 1:30). *Sophia* itself is not disparaged—in fact, the wisdom tradition of Hellenistic Judaism factors prominently in Paul's letters, particularly in his Christology.[4] Paul's proclamation of the crucified Christ as *sophia* is an antithesis to the wisdom of the world, which, as Paul explains, quoting the prophet Isaiah, God would destroy (1 Cor. 1:19).

At first glance, Paul's dichotomy might suggest a total and radical enmity between God's wisdom and the world's wisdom, a divide between revelation and reason. Instead, I would suggest that Paul's dichotomy cuts deeper. It is not simply that human reason falls short in its capacity to apprehend the divine; rather, the "wisdom of the world" that is the object of Paul's rebuke constitutes a way of knowing and acting that was inculcated in educational institutions and social circles among the privileged classes of antiquity. This "culture" of knowing and acting, *paideia*, included training not only in grammatical and rhetorical skills, but also exposed students to the core literary canon of Greek literature. Thus, there was a cultural dimension to Greek education, which aimed to produce skilled and cultured Greeks. As the work of Peter Brown has shown, the ambience of "common culture" created by *paideia* was limited, of course, to the aristocracy, the leaders of society who "as a whole stood out as the possessors of a high degree of literary culture."[5] Like any educational system, it was one that produced and reproduced particular intellectual, social, and cultural norms. It was exclusive and reinforced the power structures of Greco-Roman society by imposing a "social distance."[6]

Factionalism and divisions—according to economic and social status, gender and, it would seem, educational background—characterize the community painted by Paul in the first letter to the Corinthians. Paul is critical of those who would claim special knowledge and skills, gained through their educational training, that endowed them with a superior understanding of the God of Jesus Christ, and introduces a way of knowing and acting founded on the crucified and risen Christ. This is "wisdom" that is accessible to every member of the community. It is an equalizer. Factional competition was inappropriate within the community. The only wisdom that warranted boasting was not the worldly wisdom of Plato or Aristotle, but rather the wisdom of the God of Israel, revealed in Christ Jesus and announced by Paul.

[4]For a review of twentieth-century scholarship up to the 1980s, see E. Elizabeth Johnson, *The Function of Apocalyptic and Wisdom Traditions in Romans 9–11*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 109 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 23–29. A more recent discussion can be found in Ben E. Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1994).

[5]Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Toward a Christian Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 36–37.

[6]Ibid., 39.

The way in which Paul frames this dichotomy, particularly in his designation of the gospel as "wisdom" (for example 1 Cor. 2:6–7), does elicit a *competitive* strategy. To the Hellenized ear, Paul's "good news" is *sophia*, a true reflection of the mind of God—or the "mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16). Thus, both rhetorically and philosophically, we might say, Paul retains a stake in "wisdom" as something of great value; and he situates the wisdom of the gospel in competition with the other "wisdoms" in which certain members of the Corinthian community have invested. In other words, Paul does not argue that *sophia* is one thing, and the *evangelion* another. Instead, the gospel *is sophia*, but not the *sophia* one would learn in the orator's classroom or the philosopher's school.[7] The "secret" and "hidden" wisdom of God is understood as revealed in the cross and resurrection of Christ. It could be found not in the texts or schools of the Greek philosophers ("those who suppose they are wise" [Rom. 1:22]), but in the writings of the prophets of Israel and in the proclamation of Paul and his coworkers. God's wisdom shamed the wisdom of the elite and revealed a way to every believer, regardless of gender, status, ethnicity, or education.[8]

The canonization of Paul's letters as sacred scripture brought with it the canonization of his pronouncement of a dichotomy of wisdoms. A consequence of this codification was the fading away of the occasional nature of the letters so that, for many early Christian thinkers, Paul's instructions to a first-century community became the reference point for how a Christian could or could not reconcile the claims of Christian faith with the wisdom, or better, philosophy, of the Greek tradition. Still, varied approaches emerged. At one pole is Justin Martyr, a convert to Christianity expounding nascent doctrinal statements by drawing on the intellectual and rhetorical skills of his education and articulating the Christian narrative through the conceptual and semantic categories of Platonism. At the other we find Tertullian, who, with his famous rejection of the Greek philosophical tradition, saw (like Irenaeus) in the "mixing" of Greek learning and Christian faith a marriage that could only produce deformed, and heretical, offspring.[9]

I. Cultural Competition in Late Antiquity

The nature of the relationship between Christianity and the Greek philosophical tradition has yielded a considerable amount of attention in ancient and modern times. It is certainly not my intention to rehearse the entire scholarly tradition. Instead, I intend to propose an approach that differs in two ways from other

[7]See 1 Cor. 1:18–21.
[8]See Gal. 3:27–28.
[9]Tertullian, *Praescr.* 7: *quid ergo Athenis et Hierosolymis? Quid academiae et ecclesiae*? See Irenaeus *Haer.* 2.14.

approaches. *First, it employs a theoretical approach that investigates the real social and cultural contexts that framed the debate in Late Antiquity.* I will do this by characterizing the debate as an example of "cultural competition," a very real and multifaceted struggle, especially apparent in Late Antiquity, and beginning as early as the second century, as Greek and Christian intellectuals competed to define the religious, intellectual, and political identities of the Roman State.[10] This model of competition, rather than a naive model informed by ill-defined notions of "accommodation," "influence," or "borrowing," provides a broader understanding of the "nuts and bolts" of the intellectual machinery and social networks of early Christian authors and their opponents. Thus, in this type of model, the intellectual elites of the Christian and Greek populations are conceived of not only as religious factions in opposition, but they are also classified *together* as the class of educated, literate, philosophical thinkers who contributed to theological and cultural discourses. They are, considered together, the "educated elite," the *pepaideumenoi*, a class of intellectuals. This competition can be thought of as one between a dominant establishment—the "Greeks," who represent the status quo, and "Christians," a party of "newcomers," who, as early as the mid-second century, challenged the status quo and adopted strategies intended to subvert the legitimacy and power hold of the prevailing philosophical "orthodoxy."[11] *Second, a model of cultural competition invites us to examine cultural works (for example, art and literature) that served as the vehicles, or arenas, for debate.* The treatise has been the traditional focus of attention on this philosophical question—works, such as Eusebius's *Praeparatio evangelica*, or Augustine's *City of God* or *Against the Academics*. Here I suggest we look also at biographical literature—key texts, I argue, that constituted an arena for cultural competition.

[10]In this paper, I refrain from using the terms "pagan" and "paganism" when referring to the Greek philosophers. It is not a self-designation, but rather a Christian description of the other that developed in the western empire in the fourth century. In the context of the present discussion, it would be confusing and inappropriate because it is an all-encompassing term that included all non-Christians and non-Jews, with no distinction of social or intellectual location. Carrying the original semantic connotation of the term ("peasant," "rustic," "unlearned"), it was used to class both philosopher and peasant together on the basis of religious allegiance. I have opted to call the non-Christian philosophers "Greeks" (and Neoplatonists, when the context warrants more specificity). This is a self-descriptive term, found both in their own writings and in Christian texts, which "was endowed with the same metaphysical oecumenicity that Christianity claimed for itself" by those who considered themselves as such (Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede, eds., *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1999], 6). I am using the terms "Greek" and "Christian" to refer to the parties of an elite intellectual class *within the same cultural world*, who were struggling to negotiate and transform it in different directions. For a discussion of the use of the terms "pagan," "heathen," and "Hellene" in the study of pagan and Christian monotheism, see Athanassiadi and Frede, *Pagan Monotheism*, 1–8.

[11]Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 82–83.

The appearance of philosophical Christianities has often been approached from a perspective that sees a developing and dynamic Christianity scavenging and deforming a static classical tradition. Thankfully, the scholarly terrain has been shifting, as scholars of the ancient world recognize communicating and competing attempts among the circles of the educated to "recapture" and construct Greek culture in the context of Roman imperialism during the Second Sophistic.[12] The realities of Roman rule gave urgency to questions related to Greek epistemic, cultural, religious, and ethnic definitions. *Paideia* served as both a point of reference and a locus of competition in this process. In the context of the present discussion, I would like to pose a more specific definition of *paideia*, generally conceived of as Greek education and culture. It is also the molding and sustaining complex of ideas and practices that shaped the contours of the lives of the educated elite and afforded them a basis for a cultural authority, and, to varying degrees, social and political authority. Tim Whitmarsh builds on a Bourdieuian cultural anthropology, as applied to the Second Sophistic by Thomas Schmitz, which regards *paideia* as a "locus for a series of competitions and debates concerning the proper way in which life should be lived," rather than a "single, doctrinally coherent system."[13] What I present in this article is a similar approach, adopted independently, and applied to the biographical literature produced within Christian and Greek philosophical circles in Late Antiquity.[14]

In a recent article, Laura Nasrallah has re-mapped the location of figures such as Justin Martyr, his student Tatian, and Lucian of Samosata as participants in this Second Sophistic "negotiation of authoritative culture under conditions of empire."[15] She identifies in these authors what she terms a "geographical thinking," or a mapping of the world, with *paideia* as compass. She rightly notes a simultaneous resistance and assimilation to *paideia* on the part of all three. Tatian, for example, exhibits a negative valuation of Greek identity while he simultaneously "performs Greekness," that is, engaging his rhetorical opponent through Greek literary forms and references.[16] Justin,

[12]See, for example, Simon Goldhill, *Being Greek Under Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Simon Swain, *Hellenism and Empire: Language, Classicism, and Power in the Greek World, AD 50–250* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); Tim Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire: The Politics of Imitation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[13]Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature*, 5. See also Thomas Schmitz, *Bildung und Macht: zur sozialen und politischen Funktion der zweiten Sophistik in der griechischen Welt der Kaiserzeit* (Munich: Beck, 1997), esp. 26–31.

[14]Arthur Urbano, *Lives in Competition: Biographical Literature and the Struggle for Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 2005).

[15]Laura Nasrallah, "Mapping the World: Justin, Tatian, Lucian, and the Second Sophistic," *Harvard Theological Review* 98:3 (July 2005): 283–314.

[16]Ibid., 299.

meanwhile, appeals to the center of imperial power by aligning himself to common paideutic values: "as one of the provincial elites, speaking the common language of Greek, of privileged philosophy, and of Roman subject-hood."[17]

A prominent theme in Second Sophistic scholarship has been the function of the negotiation of *paideia* as an appropriation and imitation of an imagined glorified past so as to define a present in a conflicting dialectic with that past: how did Greeks square a culture of *paideia* with Roman imperial power? In the third and fourth centuries, as Christian intellectuals found opportunities to participate in this continuing discussion, the "privileged past" of Greece and its catalogue of authoritative representatives was thrown into question, no longer a given, as the parameters of the debate shifted. Yet even in the case of Tertullian, despite his rhetorical abandonment of philosophy, one can see an interesting conflict between an outright rejection of the philosophy of the Greeks and a constraint to defend a Christian way of life and thought to his non-Christian opponents according to the established rules of philosophical culture—conceptually, linguistically, and methodologically. We might contrast Justin and Tertullian and identify either a conscious engagement (which some might call "appropriation") or disengagement with the philosophy of the Greeks. But is this approach sufficient? Could philosophical thinking and the culture that nurtured it be simply adopted or completely abandoned at will? It seems not even the resistant Tertullian was capable of the latter. In the work *De pallio*, he justifies his adoption of the *pallium* (in Greek, the τρίβων), the distinctive garb of the philosopher, as a statement of withdrawal from society.[18] Given its association with non-Christian philosophers, Tertullian was compelled to explain why his decision did not actually advocate what he appeared to refute. In an address to the pallium itself, Tertullian performs a tailoring, a "refitting," if you will: "Now a better philosophy considered you [that is, the *pallium*] worthy, in that you began to dress the Christian."[19] Where absolute rejection might be expected, Tertullian remains vested by a very powerful and dominant intellectual culture, even outside the immediate geographical confines of the Hellenistic world.

We might think of this deep inculturation, and the tensions it produced, in the words of the author of the apocryphal correspondence between Basil of Caesarea and the celebrated orator Libanius, teacher of both Christians and Greeks. In response to Basil's uneasiness with his classical education, and

[17]Ibid., 307.
[18]Tertullian, *Pall.* 5.4: *secessi de populo*.
[19]Ibid., 6.1: *melior iam te philosophia dignata est ex quo christianum vestire coepisti.*

his humble claim to have "forgotten" what Libanius had taught him, Libanius responds:

> Of the things that are always ours, and were formerly yours, the roots remain and will remain as long as you live, and no time will ever root them out, even if you should hardly water them.[20]

The roots remained.

The narrative of Late Antiquity is in many ways the story of the "leveling up" of the social and cultural playing field between Greeks and Christians.[21] Regarding the Christian entrance and participation in the already fragmented intellectual scene of the pre-Constantinian centuries of the common era, a few observations should be made. This brief sketch is intended to locate Christian intellectuals within the social and cultural contexts, that is, the networks and trends, of philosophical circles in Late Antiquity, up to the fourth century. Then, to set the stage for the second aspect of the methodology proposed here, I will proceed with a discussion of biographical literature as an arena for debate among these circles. The paper will conclude with an examination of Athanasius's *Vita Antonii* as an application of this method.

Even before Christianity appeared on the scene, major shifts were occurring in the philosophical world. Between the first century B.C.E. and the second century C.E., the Hellenistic schools were losing their distinctiveness and influence. Divergence reigned supreme among the presumptive heirs of Socrates and Plato by the first century B.C.E., and, in the case of the Academy, divergence led to competition, competition to fragmentation, and fragmentation, compounded by external political and military factors, to demise and disappearance.[22] A new type of Platonism was taking shape, mostly in decentralized philosophical circles, outside of Athens, and scattered mostly around the eastern territories of the empire—Egypt, Syria, even Palestine.[23] This renewal was spearheaded by Pythagoreans with Platonist leanings, "reformers," if you will, who called for a return to origins, in order to recover a pure Platonism, purged of elements that had been "mixed in" from other schools. A call such as this perceived (or created) an intellectual crisis that left open the door for a rethinking and reshaping of the Platonist tradition.

[20]Basil, *Ep.* 340.

[21]I am thankful to Peter Brown for sharing this perspective.

[22]For the argument that the Athenian Academy ceased to function as an institution with a continuous succession by the first century B.C.E., see John Glucker, *Antiochus and the Late Academy* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1978).

[23]G. R. Boys-Stones, *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press), 102–104. This excellent study considers the Platonism of the early centuries of the common era as an entirely new philosophical movement and explores how these new Platonists, responding to the demise of the Hellenistic schools, constructed a Platonist narrative of the transmission of truth based on a Stoic theory of primitive wisdom.

One of the reformers of the late second century C.E., Numenius of Apamaea, maintained that a universal philosophy was found in the teaching of Pythagoras. In a work of philosophical history titled *On the Disagreement of the Academics against Plato*, Numenius proffered a scathing account of the history of Plato's Academy down to Antiochus of Ascalon.[24] He laments the "disagreement" or "divergence" (διάστασις) between the "pure" teachings of Plato and the views propagated by the Academic successors. The history of the Academy is characterized as a wandering into a heterodox mixing with Stoicism and Aristotelianism: Plato's successors "did not hold fast to the original succession" (οὐκ ἐνέμειναν τῇ πρώτῃ διαδοχῇ), and, as a result of their betrayal, the founder suffered, like the mythical Pentheus, his body tortured, twisted, and divided.[25] As Numenius saw it, Plato was a "Pythagorean" (ὁ δὲ Πλάτων πυθαγορίσας) and so proposed the following program of reform:

> Having learned about [the discord among the interpreters of Plato], we must return to the original point of issue, and just as it was our task from the beginning to separate (χωρίζειν) him (that is, Plato) from Aristotle and Zeno, thus, even now, if God helps, we should separate him from the Academy, by himself, to be in the present time a Pythagorean (Πυθαγόρειον).[26]

Christian intellectuals were not uninvolved in this renewal of Platonism. As early as the second century, Greek-speaking, literate intellectuals, that is, a small segment of what Keith Hopkins has called a "sub-elite" of Roman society, were joining Christian ranks.[27] Figures such as Justin, Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch, and Tertullian, just to name a few, were educated in the rhetorical and philosophical schools of the empire and socialized among the influential intellectual segments of Roman society. A tiny minority within a tiny minority, these skilled writers and thinkers laid important foundations for a Christian philosophical discourse that did not simply "borrow" from mainstream Platonism, but, we might say, organically grew out of the philosophical discourse of Late Antiquity.[28] It was not a corruption of a pure, simple faith, or a Frankensteinish concoction, but rather a legitimate

[24]For the text, see É. Des Places, *Numénius: Fragments* (Paris: Le Belles letters, 1973), frag. 24.47–51.

[25]Ibid., frag. 24.12. For the reference to Pentheus, see frag. 24.71–72.

[26]Ibid., frag. 24.66–70 (my translation).

[27]Keith Hopkins, "Christian Number and Its Implications," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6:2 (summer 1998): 208–209.

[28]According to Hopkins, less than 2 percent of the adult male population of the Roman empire was "sophisticated literates." Christian intellectuals would have made up about the same proportion, or slightly higher, among the Christian population, *and* should be considered as a party within the overall 2 percent of the Roman intellectual elite: Hopkins, "Christian Number," 206–211.

and viable competitor that could continue to engage other developing Platonisms, well into the third and fourth centuries. As the recent work of Edward Watts has shown, it was common for Greeks and Christians to study together under the same teachers, and so it was within these circles that philosophically inclined Christians would have been exposed to and incorporated into the discussion. As "partners" in philosophical discussions, educated Christians and pagans "disagreed about the divine" but could employ "philosophy as a common intellectual framework around which they could construct their understandings of God."[29] Thus, we see a proximity and interaction among intellectuals, Christian and not, within the educational circles of the third century, that sowed the seeds of a competition which was not only possible but perhaps even necessary. Numenius's Luthersque call *ad fontes* set the stage for a rethinking and renewal of the Platonic tradition, which was dominated by the school of Plotinus, but also opened the doors to a Christian option. I believe it is no coincidence that our major testimonies to Numenius are preserved in Porphyry, Origen, and Eusebius.[30] Both Plotinus and Origen became acquainted with the work of Numenius in the school of Ammonius in Alexandria.[31]

[29]Edward Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 169.

[30]Of the more than sixty fragments and *testimonia* of Numenius that have been preserved, twenty-six are in Eusebius, eight are in Porphyry, and five are in Origen. Of the Neoplatonists after Porphyry, Iamblichus and Proclus are the sources for Numenius. See Des Places, *Numenius*, 147–149.

[31]*Vit. Plot.* 3. See John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: A Study of Platonism, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (London: Duckworth, 1977): "It looks as if, in the person of Ammonius, Plotinus came into contact with the 'Neopythagorean underground'" (381). Porphyry reports that the treatises of Numenius the Platonist were read aloud and discussed in Plotinus's lectures: "But it was far from his way to follow any of these authors blindly; he took a personal, original view, applying Ammonius' method to the investigation of every problem" (*Vit. Plot*. 14). Some of Plotinus's critics even accused him of plagiarizing Numenius, a charge vehemently rebuked by his students. Amelius, who had worked extensively on the works of Numenius while studying with Plotinus, defended his teacher from these charges with a work titled *The Difference between the Doctrines of Plotinus and Numenius* (*Vit. Plot.* 17). At *Hist. eccl.* 6.19.5–8, Eusebius cites the testimony of Porphyry, who wrote in his polemic against Origen in his lost work *Against the Christians*, that Origen had been an "auditor" (ἀκροατής) of Ammonius. In the same passage, Porphyry also remarks that Origen, "the very man whom I happened to meet when I was very young," was well-read in the major works of Greek philosophy, including Plato and Numenius. He admits that Ammonius had been a Christian but had abandoned this way for the philosophical life, a claim that Eusebius rejects (6.19.9–10). Porphyry further contrasts Ammonius and Origen: whereas Ammonius had been raised as a Christian but abandoned Christianity for wisdom and philosophy, Origen, who had been educated in Greek learning, continued to cling to Christianity, thereby negating any claim he might have to the pedigree of Ammonius. Much scholarly debate has surrounded the identity and number of Origens and Ammonii named in these texts, a debate that F. M. Schroeder has characterized as "prosopographical schizophrenia" ("Ammonius Saccas," *ANRW* II.36.1: 504). In a classic treatment of the question, H. Dörrie ("Ammonios, der Lehrer Plotins," *Hermes* 83 [1955]: 439–477) argued that there were two Ammonii in question, one the teacher of Plotinus, the other a teacher of Origen, whom Porphyry had confused. M. Edwards, who follows

Finally, lest we underestimate the impact this faction of "Christian newcomers" could make, it is somewhat remarkable that Greek intellectuals of the so-called establishment, such as Celsus and Porphyry, found Christianity enough of a threat to compose sizeable polemical treatises (as early as the middle of the second century) refuting its doctrines and way of life. This speaks volumes to the inroads the Christian option to the philosophical crisis had made, and demonstrates that a "reasonable" and "logical," philosophically informed Christianity had made frightening progress among the intellectual classes, threatening the stabilizing status quo that the school of Plotinus was making through the efforts of his students. Christian intellectuals of the third century—most notably Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Gregory the Wonderworker—brought their literary, rhetorical, and philosophical training (the same their non-Christian peers had) to bear on their understanding of the Christian narrative and scriptures, both as a foil and as an aid.

The benefits that Greek philosophy could offer to Christians and the place it could have, along with its representatives, in a Christian worldview (and, more concretely, in a Christian education) were questions that characterized the writings of Christian intellectuals well into the fourth and fifth centuries. Paul's dichotomy would continue to guide the discussion. In Athanasius's *Life of Antony*, the desert father addresses his Greek critics by recalling the Apostle's words: "If still you do not believe, seeking logical proofs through words, we will not offer proof by means of 'plausible Greek wisdom,' as our teacher (διδάσκαλος, that is, the Apostle Paul) said, but will persuade by means of the faith that is clearly outpacing your wordy fabrications."[32] By the fourth century, Christian intellectuals exhibited a real tension between a strong criticism of the doctrines, methods, and representatives of the Greek

Dörrie ("Ammonius, Teacher of Origen," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 44:2 [April 1993]: 169–181), identifies the Ammonius who taught Origen with an otherwise unknown Alexandria Peripatetic named in *Vit. Plot.* 20. I do not think the evidence necessitates such a distinction, *pace* Dörrie and Edwards. While it must be admitted that the evidence is somewhat inconclusive, there has been a tendency to multiply the number of people bearing the same names within a relatively small circle of intellectuals as a way to avoid mixing Greek (read, pagan) and Christian teachers and students. What we seem to have in this textual debate between Porphyry and Eusebius are the claims of the intellectual heirs of Ammonius (Porphyry through Plotinus, and Eusebius through Origen) to the direction and ownership of the philosophical renewal.

[32]Athanasius, *Vit. Ant.* 80 (*The Life of Antony: The Coptic Life and the Greek Life*, trans. Tim Vivian and Apostolos Athanassakis [Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2003]). Note that in the Corinthian correspondence, Paul never denotes "the wisdom of the world" as specifically "Greek." But here, in the *Vit. Ant.*, the Apostle's words are understood as a dichotomy between Christian faith and Greek philosophy. The Greek critical text is that of G. J. M. Bartelink, *Vie d'Antoine*, Sources chrétiennes 400 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1994).

schools of philosophy and the presentation of the Christian faith as a revealed doctrinal faith that could be understood through reason and defended logically—using methods developed and inculcated in Greek schools. What appears, then, is a gap between the self-description of writers like Tertullian and Athanasius and the real circumstances of their relationship to the traditions of Greek philosophy and Hellenic culture.

I would suggest that there is, at some level, a "misrecognition" of their indebtedness, commitment to, and formation in philosophical culture.[33] In one respect, this is the apparent denial of and disinterest in the cultural value and economic benefits that accompanied intellectual and philosophical expertise in the ancient world. It also refers to the social and cultural constraints of the perception of the actors in a competition of this sort to discern, or recognize, its many facets.[34] For example, Antony of Egypt's famous avoidance of primary and secondary education overtly disavows the authority and value of that education (*Vit. Ant.* 1.2); however, Athanasius would not have attained the skills to write about Antony had he himself not benefited from the very education he disavows. Similarly, Antony's dismissal of artful rhetoric and argumentation is itself articulated in finely crafted rhetorical argumentation (*Vit. Ant.* 78.2–3). Thus, we might say that Athanasius's "misrecognition" lay both in his neglect to reference his own educational training at any time and in his familiarity with rhetoric and philosophy. Through a constructed representation of Antony of Egypt, Athanasius disavows the cultural and social value of such things. Yet the alternative he proposes is not completely divorced from the dominant system, *paideia*. Instead, it is simultaneously one that is influenced by the dominant system and converts it. In this case, misrecognition entails either the conscious or unconscious disinterest in the influence and authority associated with Greek intellectual training and pedagogical authority. At an unconscious, internalized level, the semantics and specialized discourse of philosophy, the values and cultural norms inculcated through *paideia*, and the socialization by virtue of being in these strata of Greco-Roman society (as opposed to, say, being an uneducated slave) contributed in very real ways to Athanasius's descriptions of the philosophical life.

Thus, whether conscious or unconscious, the misrecognition displayed in Christian intellectuals of the period under investigation reveals a tension. I am not making a relativistic claim that Christian intellectuals were simply "pagans in disguise." Rather, they constructed and proposed characteristically Christian views, for example, on human nature and its relationship to the divine (to name just one), which challenged and

[33]See Bourdieu, *Cultural Production*, 75.
[34]Schmitz, *Bildung und Macht*, 28.

competed with the dominant outlook of Greek *pepaideumenoi.* Nevertheless, as members of the intellectual class, they still maintained an investment in similar interests, forms of cultural capital—for example, knowledge, skills, and actual objects of cultural value.[35] In the present discussion, we can see Greek and Christian intellectuals competing to produce and acquire the same forms of cultural capital—for example, education, intellectual lineages, access to or possession of important philosophical texts, and the skills to read, interpret, and debate their content, including a linguistic capital of specialized philosophical terminology and the fora to engage in debate, rhetorical and literary.

Participants compete within "fields," social formations that develop economies of symbolic goods within structured spaces of accepted norms and practices that have their own internal logic and power relations. So we might think of Christian and Greek intellectuals as competitors in overlapping fields of philosophy, religion, and education. Of course, these are not easily extricable in the context of antiquity. When defining fields in relation to the academic and literary worlds of modern France, Pierre Bourdieu can describe them as cultural fields, which are autonomous from political and economic fields.[36] In order to fit this type of field theory to the structures of Late Antiquity, it is necessary to recognize that, while the field of philosophy had a semi-autonomy, it was not completely independent of imperial politics and the economy. Think of emperors such as Marcus Aurelius, Constantine, Julian, and Theodosius, and the role they played as patron and trendsetter in these areas—in their funding of academic institutions and book production, and in their active involvement in promoting doctrine and practice.

Participants employ strategies rooted in a certain "feel for the game," what Bourdieu calls *habitus*, a set of skills and dispositions, or embodied principles that generate actions.[37] Schmitz has identified *paideia* as the *habitus* of Greco-Roman antiquity.[38] Formed in the intellectual, cultural, and social norms of *paideia* and included among the small percentage of educated elite, men such as Porphyry, Eusebius, Athanasius, and the emperor Julian shared common elite values regarding education, literacy, status, and culture (and sometimes learned them side by side with one another) that

[35]David Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 75.

[36]Bourdieu, *Cultural Production*, 6.

[37]Bourdieu, *Cultural Production*, 5. As Swartz explains, *habitus* comprises deeply internalized master dispositions that tend to function unconsciously and are "fairly resistant" to change (*Culture and Power*, 101–107).

[38]Schmitz, *Bildung und Macht*, 29.

influenced and guided their participation in the competition—as all of us who are academics know, there are certain rules we are expected to play by.

The participants in this competition within the philosophical field of Late Antiquity can be divided into two main parties, Greeks, who represent the conservative status quo, and Christians, "newcomers" who represented a challenge to the Greeks. These parties engaged in competition for cultural capital, with a view to converting them into "symbolic capital," or an economy of authority and influence. This final point is especially important, lest we underestimate what was at stake, and reduce the discussion to a simple "power struggle" between pagans and Christians. The competition focused in many ways on "pedagogic authority." *Paideia* was regarded as the formational process through which the youth learned to live the "good life," in a philosophical harmony of thought and action in conformity with the divine. Thus, at stake was not simply the dominance of certain ideas or "discourses," but the curricula of schools and the formative principles to be reproduced and instilled in the youth. It also extended to the proper worship of the divine and the direction of political policy based on theological principles. There was indeed much at stake, especially in the fourth century, and a competition of this nature was absolutely necessary.

II. The Biography as Philosophical Text

Alongside treatises that delineated the dialectical aspects of philosophical debate, Christian and Greek intellectuals produced biographies that described the life and teachings of exemplary teachers and ascetics. As a locus of cultural competition, the ancient *bios* was a literary vehicle that portrayed subjects as representations of divine wisdom. They were seen to possess a special proximity to the divine, and, as such, were embodiments and paradigms of virtue, revealers, teachers, and transmitters of philosophy. As teachers, the subjects were also founders or leaders of various kinds of communities. Biographers, most often their "students," cast their subjects as philosophical "ancestors." In Late Antiquity, subjects could have been the first revealers of divine wisdom (for example, Iamblichus's Pythagoras or Philo's Moses), or the teachers who appeared at significant moments in the history of philosophy to restore philosophical authenticity (for example, Porphyry's Plotinus or Eusebius's Origen). Biographers construed themselves as descendants and heirs of the philosophical patrimony passed on in precious texts, in the process of education, and, most often, in the personal relationship they had with their teachers.

Competition among the intellectual circles of antiquity contributed significantly to the development and evolution of biographical literature. The Hellenistic era witnessed important evolutions in the formal development of a generic theory of the *bios*.[39] The Socratics, Peripatetics, and the later Platonists all took a particular interest in utilizing biographical literature as a way of promoting philosophical doctrines and praising their subjects as persons, not only of historical importance, but also as embodiments of philosophical ideals.[40] The great biographer Plutarch likened his task to the work of artists. In a famous passage from the prologue to his *Life of Alexander*, Plutarch posited a stark distinction between the "life" and the "history." As an author of "lives," instead of "histories," his task was to portray his subjects' characters through the "signs of the soul" (εἰς τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς σημεῖα). Histories, as mere collections of great deeds (πράξεις), did not necessarily provide a moral directive (δήλωσις ἀρετῆς ἢ κακίας). The composition of a *bios* was analogous to the work of painters who represented the character of their subject through a careful representation of the face and eyes. The portrait or the statue demonstrated in a static but eternal moment the ethical composition of the subject. It was a portrait of the soul.[41] Likewise, the biographer painted a portrait of the soul in words, using deeds to demonstrate character.[42]

Recent studies on the origins and literary characteristics of the *bios* have focused attention on its social contexts and functions.[43] As arenas of

[39]Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 12; Patricia Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 6.

[40]Tomas Hägg and Philip Rousseau, eds., *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 4. The Peripatetics, in particular, contributed to the development of the biographical genre. Among the Peripatetics who continued this tradition, Jerome (*De viris illustribus* 2.821) names several, including Hermippus, Satyrus, Antigonus, and Sotion, most, if not all, of whom seem to have written works of collective biography. Sotion composed a work titled "The Succession of Philosophers": see Momigliano, *Development*, 65–76.

[41]The Christian authors of Late Antiquity knew and understood Plutarch's metaphor and used it to express the purpose of their own works. For example, Eusebius of Caesarea, in his *Life of Constantine*, also compared his role as author to that of the "human painter," dedicating a "verbal icon" (διὰ λόγων εἰκόνα) to the memory of the deceased emperor (*Vit. Const.* 1.10). Likewise, Gregory of Nyssa in the *Life of Moses* used the language of artistic production as a Platonic metaphor for the biographical enterprise in which he attempted to "sketch in outline" (τύπῳ ὑπογραφῆναι) the life of Moses as a model for the perfect life (*Life of Moses*, 1.3).

[42]Plutarch, *Alexander*, 1. The analogy of the biographical text and the sculpted image was already present in previous works. Isocrates (*Evagoras*, 73) expressed his preference for written "likenesses of deeds and of the character" to statues.

[43]In a 1978 article ("Biographies of Philosophers and Rulers as Instruments of Religious Propaganda in Mediterranean Antiquity," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II 16:2, 1619–1651), Charles Talbert classified *bioi* according to functions within what he called the "social-intellectual-spiritual milieu" of the communities that produced them. For example, *bioi* could serve propagandistic and didactic purposes by providing a hermeneutical framework for interpreting the texts, practices, and memory of philosophers. They could also maintain a sense

competition between Christian and Greek intellectuals, biographies served apologetic and polemical purposes by promoting teachers and delineating philosophical dynasties. Thus, despite the strict generic distinction Plutarch made between the ancient "biography" and the "history," I would suggest that biographies (and especially collective biographies, such as Eunapius's *Lives of the Sophists* and Theodoret of Cyrrhus's *Religious History*) could serve a historiographical purpose as accounts of the origins and transmission of philosophical traditions as told through the lives of exemplary representatives—just as one today might teach a history of philosophy through the study of major thinkers. As contributions to a process of tradition building, philosophical *bioi*,[44] individually and collectively, told the history of philosophy. Dynasties required history to claim an inheritance, in this case, not only the inheritance of a precious philosophical tradition, but also the right to protect and guard it, and the skill and authority to correctly teach and transmit it.[45]

It was not uncommon for teachers and students in antiquity to regard their relationship as one of father to son. In his correspondence, Libanius regularly addressed his students as παῖδες. In one of these letters, Libanius construes the kinship as one "of words," paralleling it with a kinship of blood: "How could you not help Arrhabius too who is also my child, and even more than Eusebius? For it is [a kinship] of words with Arrhabius, but it is also [a kinship] through blood, which is not the case with Eusebius."[46] Furthermore, Libanius often used the verb τρέφειν to describe the

of continuous authoritative tradition through lines of succession. Likewise Patricia Cox, in *Biography*, called attention to the way in which the literary characteristics of ancient biographies addressed sociopolitical and cultural concerns.

[44]By "philosophical *bioi*," I mean those Christian and non-Christian *bioi* that skillfully employ explicit philosophical language and imagery, and follow the general structure of and include the tropes of classic biographical genres—birth, childhood, education, deeds that demonstrate character, works, followers, succession, etc.

[45]Both Greek and Christian authors often used the economic metaphor of "philosophy" as an inheritance or wealth. See, for example, Theodoret, *Religious History* 16.1 (Maron heaps up a "wealth of philosophy" [τῆς φιλοσοφίας συναθροίζων τὸν πλοῦτον] through his labors). See also Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Macrina* 37.22. Marinus, in the *Life of Proclus*, describes the philosopher Proclus's arrival in Athens as his taking possession of his rightful "inheritance," the tradition of Platonic philosophy (*Vita Procli* 10). The economic imagery fits well with the economic metaphor Bourdieu uses in his theory of symbolic and cultural goods.

[46]Libanius, *Ep.* 170 (*Autobiography and Selected Letters*, trans. A. F. Norman, Loeb Classical Library 478–479, 1992). πῶς οὐκ ἂν καὶ Ἀρραβίῳ παιδί γε ὄντι καὶ αὐτῷ καὶ μᾶλλόν γε ἢ ἐκείνῳ; τὸ μὲν γὰρ τῶν λόγων καὶ παρὰ τῷδε, τὸ δὲ καὶ δι' αἵματος οὐ παρ' ἐκείνω. See also *Ep.* 1266 (*Libanii Opera*, trans. R. Foerster [Teubner, 1963]): παῖδας γὰρ ἔγωγε καλῶ τοὺς μαθητάς. Many more examples are listed in Paul Petit, *Les étudiants de Libanius* (Nouvelles Éditions latines, 1957), 33–36.

pedagogical kinship with his students.[47] Even contemporary sociological analyses of education recognize the important function of education as not only formative, but also socially and culturally reproductive.[48] For the educated elite of Late Antiquity, intellectual skill and achievement were important, but it was also important to have a respectable pedigree, an educational lineage, that situated one within a philosophical tradition connected to a teacher. The *bios* served as an ancestral portrait.

Two important "biographers" of the late third and early fourth centuries were Porphyry and Eusebius. Their compositions contributed, in part, to a high-stakes debate over the origins and direction of a philosophical renewal. If we consider Plotinus the genius behind the renewal, Porphyry was its first systematizer, interpreter, promoter, and chronicler. His early work, the *Philosophical History*, outlined the history of philosophy from Pythagoras to Plato through a series of biographical portraits. His best known biographical work, the *Life of Plotinus*, might be considered an appropriate appendix and climax to this historical project, one that represented and reproduced a dominant culture of *paideia* in continuity with an esteemed Greek past.

In many ways, Eusebius might be seen as the Christian counterpart to Porphyry, his *Ecclesiastical History*, with an extended biographical section dedicated to Origen, an interesting analogue. As apologist, historian, exegete, and biographer, Eusebius made foundational contributions to the construction and presentation of a Christian tradition, including a Christian intellectual tradition. His biographical accounts of Origen and Pamphilus, in particular, represent an important foray into the discussion regarding the direction of philosophy and its authentic representatives in an age of persecution. In these works, Eusebius promoted his predecessors as Christian scholars, representatives of an Alexandrian-Caesarean tradition of Christian philosophy. In the sixth book of the *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius presents Origen as a philosopher and ascetic who lived and taught a tradition, which was grounded in both the philosophy of the Greeks and Christian revelation.[49] It seems to be addressed to both Greek and Christian detractors

[47]Libanius, *Ep.* 1165 (Foerster), and other examples in Petit, *Étudiants*, 31.

[48]See, for example, the volume of Pierre Bourdieu, co-authored with Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, trans. Richard Nice (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1970). Bourdieu argues that education is the means by which a cultural heritage is conserved, inculcated, "consecrated" (or legitimated), and reproduced. It provides students with the necessary formation and skills that equip them to participate in cultural competition.

[49]The precise date of the composition of this section of the *Hist. eccl.* is debated. It is generally agreed, however, that the first seven books of the work predate Constantine, and probably the Great Persecution. See T. D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 146, and Averil Cameron, "Eusebius of Caesarea and the Rethinking of History," in Emilio Gabba (ed.), *Tria Corda: Scritti in onore di Arnaldo Momigliano* (Como: Edizioni New Press, 1983), 71–73.

of Origen: he is both a skilled philosopher and expositor of orthodoxy.[50] From an early age, and at the insistence of his father, Origen was immersed "in Greek learning" (ἐν τοῖς Ἑλλήνων μαθήμασιν [6.2.15]), receiving a standard "general education" (ἡ τῶν ἐγκυκλίων παιδεία [6.2.7]) in addition to his training in the scriptures. So impressive was his knowledge of philosophy that his Greek peers proclaimed him a "great philosopher" (μέγαν . . . φιλόσοφον). Likewise, Pamphilus, student of Pierinus (whom tradition would remember as a "new Origen") and teacher of Eusebius, is described by his spiritual son as the "jewel" of the Caesarean church.[51] He was exceptional in his comprehension of Greek *paideia* and superior to all others in his knowledge of Christian dogma.[52]

This model of the Christian teacher would be rejected in Athanasius of Alexandria's *Life of Antony*. When read with an eye to his earlier works, which criticized the dominant Greek intellectual culture, his *bios* of the provincial Copt contributed in part to the cultural competition, as both a rejection of earlier attempts to represent the Christian philosopher (for example, the biographical sketch of Origen in Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*), and, more broadly speaking, a refutation of *paideia*, the philosophical status quo, and any attempt (even Christian) to associate wisdom and virtue with power, education, and ethnicity. In short, Athanasius aims to displace the dominant image of the philosopher, recasting it in the form of a new type of philosopher found in an unexpected place.

III. Athanasius of Alexandria's Alternative *Paideia*

The *Life of Antony* (henceforth, *Vit. Ant.*), traditionally attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria,[53] was and remains one of the most known and imitated works of

[50]For example, see *Hist. eccl.* 6.2.14: Origen demonstrates "clear proofs (δείγματα) of his orthodoxy concerning the faith"; and 6.18.1: Ambrose, a Valentinian heretic, converts to "ecclesiastical orthodoxy" (τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ὀρθοδοξίας) upon listening to Origen.

[51]After Pamphilus's death in 309, Eusebius composed a *bios* to memorialize him. It is no longer extant, but Eusebius refers to it several times in the *Hist. eccl.* (for example at 6.32.3 and 7.32.25).

[52]See Eusebius, *Martyrs of Palestine* (11.1.d, long recension). According to Barnes, the longer recension was the first edition of the text published in 311, shortly after the publication of the Edict of Milan. The short recension would have been completed in 313, upon Constantine's capture of Rome. The longer recension is preserved in Syriac in the manuscript tradition. The shorter recension is included in four Greek manuscripts of the *Hist. eccl.* immediately after book 8. See Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 149.

[53]Athanasian authorship has not gone without challenge, though the current scholarly consensus recognizes the hand of Athanasius behind the extant Greek version of the *Vit. Ant.*, as either author or redactor. I do not believe there is any compelling reason on textual, linguistic, or theological grounds to call this into serious doubt. Antony died in 356. Gregory Nazianzen credited Athanasius with the writing of the *Vit. Ant.* about 380: "He wrote the *Life* of the divine Antony in the guise of a monastic rule in the form of a narrative" (*Or.* 21.5). In *De viris illustribus*

Christian biographical literature from Late Antiquity. Scholarship on the *Vit. Ant.*, considered a "prototype" of Christian hagiography, is extensive.[54] My intention is not to focus on its place in Christian literature or the development of monasticism. Instead, I will apply the methodology outlined above, which itself builds on groundwork begun by Philip Rousseau and Samuel Rubenson in relation to Athanasius's portrayal of Antony as a Christian teacher and philosopher.[55] Through a reading of the accounts of Antony's formation as a youth and his encounters with Greek philosophers in chapters 72–80, I will demonstrate that these episodes express in narrative form similar anti-Greek polemic to that found in Athanasius's apologetic works *Contra gentes* and *De incarnatione* and contributed to the continuing competition with Greek intellectuals over the origins, content, and

(ca. 392), Jerome made the same attribution: "We have from him [that is, Athanasius] . . . a history containing the life of the monk Antony" (87). He continues, "The monk Antony, whose life Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, expounded in a remarkable book, etc." (88). Jerome also attributed the Latin translation to Evagrius who, he added, translated from the Greek version of Athanasius (125). Fifth-century authors also named Athanasius as author (Rufinus, *Hist. Eccl.* 1.8; Paulinus of Milan, *Vita Ambrosii*, prol.; Palladius *Hist. Laus.*, 8.6; Socrates *Hist. Eccl.*, 1.21 and 4.23). Athanasian authorship was first questioned in the sixteenth century by Reformers, mostly on the basis that no Greek text of the work was known. The publication of the Syriac text in 1980 by Draguet (*La vie primitive de S. Antoine conservée en Syriaque*) and his theory that it was a translation of a copticizing Greek original, different from the extant Greek version, seemed to preclude the possibility that Athanasius was the author. In his revision of Draguet, T. D. Barnes ("Angel of Light or Mystic Initiate? The Problem of the *Life of Anthony*," *Journal of Theological Studies* 37:2 [1986] 353–368) posited an original Coptic version behind the Syriac instead of a copticizing Greek version. On the basis of vocabulary, Barnes argues that Athanasius could not have been the redactor of the extant version, which was made for a more urban Greco-Roman audience ("Angel," 367). Tetz hypothesized that the extant Greek version was a reworking of an original written by bishop Serapion of Thumis. He concluded this on the basis of the allusion to the author's source of information mentioned in the prologue (*Vit. Ant.*, pro. 5). Louth, Lorenz, Bartelink, Brakke, and Brennan all accept Athanasian authorship. In a study of the Syriac version, Brakke concluded that it was a fifth-century revision of the extant Greek written by Athanasius. Bartelink lists a number of parallels in ideas and content between the *Vit. Ant.* and the apologetic works *Contra gentes* and *De incarnatione* to conclude that Athanasius was indeed the author of the *bios*. For a more detailed treatment of the various theories, see Bartelink, *Vie d'Antoine*, 29–36. In my own discussion of the work, I adopt the view of Bartelink. As I hope my discussion will demonstrate, there are enough similarities between Athanasius's philosophical views in *Contra gentes, De incarnatione*, and *Vit. Ant.* to suggest that we are dealing with the same author. This is a view held also by Khaled Anatolios (*Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* [New York: Routledge, 1998], 166, and n. 27).

[54]Bartelink, *Vie d'Antoine* 47.

[55]For the contributions of Rousseau ("Antony as Teacher in the Greek *Life*," 89–109) and Samuel Rubenson ("Philosophy and Simplicity: The Problem of Classical Education in Early Christian Biography," 110–139), see Hägg and Rousseau, *Greek Biography and Panegyric.*

transmission of authentic philosophy, and the displacement and recasting of conventional representations of the philosopher.[56]

In the early works, Athanasius challenged the pedagogic authority of his intellectual rivals, and refuted the claim that wisdom and virtue could be most successfully pursued within the confines of Greek education and on the basis of Greek authorities and texts. I prefer to understand Athanasius's literary and intellectual activities as forms of "competition" precisely because they are not wholly unlike the literary and intellectual activities of his opponents. That is to say, Athanasius shared key skills and dispositions—training in literature and rhetoric, a knowledge of philosophical terminology, and a *general* sense of philosophical views on human nature, the cosmos, and society, which were not *wholly* unlike that of his opponents. To put it simply, Athanasius had the knowledge and skills to play the philosophical game. Thus, we might say, on the one hand, that Athanasius entered the competition on a common playing field, adhering to similar rules and using similar tools. On the other hand, there was much, in fact, at stake—including a precise understanding of the nature of God, his purpose in the incarnation (a doctrine Athanasius's Greek competitors considered utterly irrational), and its implications for human nature. Practically speaking, also at stake were the means and support to defend and propagate these views. To the well-educated, refined, and socially respected Greek philosopher formed by *paideia*, Athanasius's *Vit. Ant.* put forth an unlikely alternative in the uninstructed, unkempt, socially marginalized Coptic hermit. The *bios* then served as an arena in which a developing alternative *Christian paideia* was proposed, one founded on Christian texts, doctrines, and authorities, in which the Church and its leaders, most notably bishops and monks, preserved and transmitted an education of real value. Thus, in the *Vit. Ant.* we discover an attempt at representing hermit and bishop as "both undefiled by human learning and wiser than Greek philosophers."[57] To this end, a two-fold strategy can be discerned: on the one hand, any "defilement," or, more neutrally speaking, any connection to Greek *paideia*, its *habitus*, and treasure

[56]All agree that these companion works were written before 338, when Athanasius returned from his first exile. The apparent absence of any explicit allusion to the Arian crisis led some to believe that the work was very early (J. C. M. Van Winden, "On the Date of Athanasius' Apologetic Treatises," *Vigiliae Christianae* 29:4 [December 1975] 291–295). Charles Kannengiesser ("La date de l'Apologie d'Athanase 'Contre les Païens' et 'Sur l'Incarnation du Verbe'," *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 58:3 [July–September 1970] 383–423) held that it was written during the exile in Trier. Michael Slusser ("Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione*: Place and Date of Composition," *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., 37:1 [April 1986]: 114–117) argued that the works were written before the exile, thus before 335. It is very probable that Athanasius used Eusebius's *Theophany* as a model for these works, especially in its criticism of *paideia*. See R. W. Thomson, trans., *Athanasius:* Contra Gentes *and* De Incarnatione, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), xxi–xxii.

[57]Rubenson, "Philosophy and Simplicity," 111.

of goods is misrecognized, while, on the other hand, they are openly challenged in an attempt to recast and convert their value in the light of a Christian economy.

I would also suggest that in many respects, the *Vit. Ant.* is also responding to the previous *Christian* attempts to represent the Christian philosopher, discussed briefly above. That is, we can also identify competing trends within Christian circles. Eusebius's biographical sketch of Origen tended more toward a harmony, rather than a strict dichotomy, between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God. Greek philosophy was a "preparation" for Christian philosophy. Antony was not an Origen, who, as Eusebius argued, was just as much a philosopher, indeed a better one, than his Greek contemporaries—he received a standard Greek education, was surrounded by books and students in his "school," and lived and worked in major urban intellectual centers such as Alexandria and Caesarea.[58] Eusebius's presentation of Origen's successful engagement with Greek learning was an attempt at legitimizing Origen's standing as a *bona fide pepaideumenos* of a Greek model, while more broadly responding to the charges of "irrationality" with a demonstration of the intellectual and rational character of Christianity. Furthermore, Antony's indifference and hesitation at the reception of letters from Constantine and Constans (who, the monks had to convince their Abba, were truly Christians) contrasts wildly with Eusebius's portrait of Constantine at the Council of Nicaea, in the *Vita Constantini*.[59] In the latter, the emperor appears as the "philosopher-king" who guides the bishops to unity and unanimity, a role that Athanasius was hesitant to concede to

[58]This, of course, raises the question of the relationship between the "historical Antony" and Athanasius's representation of him in the *Vit. Ant.* Because of space constraints, the focus of the present article is on the representation of Antony in the *Vita.* On the relationship to the historical Antony, Rubenson argues in *The Letters of St. Antony* that the letters attributed to Antony are in fact authentic and depict the ascetic as an educated "man of letters" (185) who demonstrates a familiarity with Platonism and betrays an Origenist influence. While the differences between the Antony of the letters and the Antony of the *Vita* are significant, there is not a complete disconnect—as will be demonstrated below, the Antony of the *Vita* acts as a mouthpiece for the theological and political designs of Athanasius; nevertheless, as Rubenson notes, much of the philosophical and theological background of the *Vit. Ant.* is shared in the letters (140). Both the self-representation of Antony and Athanasius's portrayal of him depict a Christian teacher who instructs on the basis of a philosophical interpretation of scripture. The main difference lay in how each acquired his knowledge and skills—while it seems most likely that the historical Antony would have been educated in a Coptic Christian school where both Christian and Greek literature was studied (for this possibility, see Rubenson, 109), the Antony of the *Vita* was "unschooled" and was instead *theodidaktos*, "taught by God."

[59]*Vit. Ant.* 81. One is reminded of the *chreia*, recorded in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, relating the encounters of Alexander the Great with Diogenes the Cynic: "When he was sunning himself in the Craneum, Alexander came and stood over him and said, 'Ask of me any boon you like.' To which he replied, 'Stand out of my light'" (6.38, Hicks, LCL). See also 6.32, 60, 63, 68. For Constantine at the Council, see *Vit. Const.* 3.10–13, in Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall, eds., *Life of Constantine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

imperial authority, especially, as in the case of Constantius, when it favored the opponents of Nicaea.

Athanasius, on the other hand, argued that Greek *paideia* was neither a preparation nor a necessary prerequisite for the path to virtue.[60] From very early in his career, Athanasius conceived of a vast divide between Greeks and Christians and adopted a strategy that characterized Greek philosophy as the corrupted product of corrupting polytheism and idolatry, a result of "inadequate and irrational reasoning."[61] Thus it was useless (*pace* Origen's understanding of philosophy as "useful"[62]) and unnecessary for arriving at true knowledge of God. The revelation found in scripture was sufficient, and there was no need to supplement revelation with Greek wisdom.

I believe it is important to note that while Athanasius's rejection of Greek philosophy was blunt and his investment in it not *overt*, he did have an adequate familiarity with Platonic philosophy, espoused some of its ideas, and was able to engage in the "philosophical game" of dialectical argumentation.[63] He tread an interesting line between bankrupting the Greek philosophers of their authority and voice, and engaging them on their own turf. Despite the fact that the details of Athanasius's early life and education are sketchy, his way of articulating an alternative philosophical culture belies an apparent influence of Greek *paideia* and, I would argue, points to a *concealed*, even if habituated, investment. His own silence on his background served to distance himself further from any endorsement.[64]

[60]Like Irenaeus (*Haer.* 3.24), Athanasius linked Christian heresy to the study of Greek philosophy. See E. P. Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius: Synthesis or Antithesis?* (Leiden: Brill, 1974) 15. It is also interesting to note that to distinguish Greek philosophy further from Christianity, Athanasius does not use the term "wisdom" (as Paul does) for each. In the *Vit. Ant.*, Christian knowledge is never *sophia* or *philosophia*. It is *pistis*. In the apologetical works, Athanasius, alluding to 1 Cor. 1:24, refers to Christ as "the wisdom of God," that is, the phrase is interchangeable with the concept of the Logos (*Contra gentes* 1.40). This wisdom of God, having become incarnate, condescended to the level of fallen humanity in order to teach it and to lead it away from idolatry and the foolish "wisdom of the Greeks" (see *Inc.* 15; 46.4; 48.9).

[61]*C. gent.*, 8.

[62]See, for example, Origen, *Letter to Gregory.*

[63]H. Dörrie, "Die Vita Antonii als Geschichtsquelle," in *Nachrichten von der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen* (1949): 345: Athanasius had a thorough knowledge of Hellenic thought; Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism*, follows Dörrie and adds that while Athanasius uses philosophical arguments in *C. gent.*, he only speaks negatively about Greek philosophers, even when admitting that some Platonic ideas were almost right (121, 127). Meijering also states in his commentary on *C. gent.* that Athanasius does not display any profound knowledge of contemporary *Neo*-Platonism (*C. gent.*, 16). He cites Plato frequently (for example, at *C. gent.* 10.36; *Inc.* 2.3.2; 43.7.2) and Porphyry, "the enemy of θεοσεβεία," only once (*De decr. Nic.*, 39.1.3). He never mentions Plotinus or Iamblichus.

[64]The details of Athanasius's early life are far too sketchy to draw any firm conclusions. In the *Oration in Honor of Athanasius* (*Or.* 21, composed ca. 380), Gregory Nazianzen wrote that the

The intellectual character of ancient Alexandria is a subject of great interest, one that cannot be explored in great detail here. Nevertheless, some reflections on the nature of the education of a young Christian man at the beginning of the fourth century might help to shed some light on what I mean when I characterize Athanasius's commitment to the classical philosophical tradition as one that is, in part, "misrecognized." We know that the Christian intellectual environment of Alexandria in the second and third centuries was one in which there was close contact between Christian and non-Christian thinkers. Origen and his colleague Heraclas, future bishop of Alexandria, both studied under Ammonius Saccas, also teacher of Plotinus.[65] The curriculum of Origen's "school" at Alexandria included the study of the Greek philosophers and was open to both Christian and non-Christian students.[66] Eusebius writes:

> For [Origen] also used to introduce to the study of philosophy as many as he saw were actually gifted, imparting geometry and arithmetic and the other preliminary subjects, and then leading them on to the sects which are found among the philosophers, giving a detailed account of their treatises, commenting upon and examining each.[67]

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patriarch of Alexandria had received enough of a Greek education (ὀλίγα τῶν ἐγκυκλίων φιλοσοφήσας) so as not to appear ignorant of matters he so despised and vehemently refuted. He had little time and toleration for Greek "vanities" (ματαίοις) and chose instead to devote himself to the study of the Old and New Testaments. In this way, he matured in the intellectual and ethical ways of life (*Or.* 21.6).

[65]Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.19.13–14. See note 31 above.

[66]The nature of the "catechetical school" of Alexandria and its relationship to the episcopal see of that city remain difficult problems. According to Eusebius, Bishop Demetrius designated Origen as the head of the catechetical school when he was just eighteen years old (*Hist. eccl.* 6.3.1). In this capacity, he most likely prepared catechumens for baptism. At the same time, it appears that Origen taught privately as a *grammaticus*, and eventually his *private* school developed into a sort of philosophical school that attracted Christian and non-Christian students. In Eusebius's account, the distinction between the catechetical school and the school of philosophy is not clear. It is often the case that he combines the two into some sort of formal ecclesiastical educational institution (probably on the model of what he knew in Caesarea) that fell under the jurisdiction of the bishop. He also co-opts Origen's "predecessors," Clement and Pantaenus, into this "institution," portraying their probably private and independent schools as the same "catechetical school." For more on the schools of Alexandria and Caesarea, see Gustave Bardy, "Aux origens de l'ecole d'Alexandria," in *Recherches de science religieuse* 27 (1937); Manfred Hornschuh, "Das Leben des Origenes," in *Zeitschrift für der Kirchengeschichte* 71 (1960); John McGuckin, "Caesarea Maritima as Origen Knew It," in *Origeniana Quinta: Papers of the 5th International Origen Congress, Boston College, 14–18 August 1989*, ed. R. J. Daly (Louvain, 1992), 3–25; Roelof van den Broek, "The Christian 'School' of Alexandria in the Second and Third Centuries," in *Studies in Gnosticism and Alexandrian Christianity* (New York: Brill, 1996), 197–205; Annewies van den Hoek, "The 'Catechetical' School of Early Christian Alexandria," *Harvard Theological Review* 90:1 (January 1997) 59–87; and John McGuckin, ed., *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (2004), 4–7, and *voces* "School of Alexandria" and "School of Caesarea."

[67]Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.18.3 (Loeb translation with modifications).

Tension mounted between the lay Christian teacher and the bishop during Origen's tenure as head of catechetical instruction in Alexandria, with the bishop (particularly Demetrius) attempting to bring lay teachers under his direct control and supervision. Any independence, or what has been called the "private" nature, such a school may have had, in relation to the bishop's authority, was lost after Origen: his two immediate successors, Heraclas and Dionysius, were both elected bishops of Alexandria.[68] Heraclas, in particular, was philosophically inclined, and even donned the philosopher's attire.[69] Watts has argued that the Alexandrian church, growing more and more suspicious of independent Christian teachers in conversation with non-Christian intellectuals and their ideas, began to take measures to "eliminate the speculative environment" of these circles.[70] As a result, the sort of social and cultural interaction and exchange of ideas between Christians and Greeks that characterized an earlier period in Alexandria diminished. (Eusebius, for example, cites Porphyry's praise of Origen's knowledge of philosophical literature to score points for Origen.[71]) Nevertheless, the study of the Greek philosophers continued, as is evidenced by the great Christian intellectuals of the fourth century who were certainly familiar with their works. But by this point, the philosophical articulation of Christian doctrine, which earlier had been in more direct conversation with the circles of Greek intellectuals, while not abandoned, had simply become the accepted mode of expression. In many respects, its debt to a previous period when there was more Christian/Greek interaction, and to the continuing intellectual discussion of Alexandria, was misrecognized. Thus, a young man like Athanasius, educated in the ecclesiastical circles of Christian Alexandria in the early fourth century, would most likely have been isolated from the social and intellectual networks of Alexandrian Greeks in a way that Origen was not. The Arian controversy of the fourth century only served to enhance the Alexandrian church's suspicion of Christian teachers with a speculative philosophical bent. Watts sees Athanasius's attacks against academic Christianity in his festal letters as a response to Arianism, and the *Life of Antony* as "an original and carefully designed program" that identifies the Christian ascetic as the true philosopher.[72]

Athanasius's overt offensive against Greek thought and practice began long before the Arian controversy and is found in his early apologetic works. Many of his arguments here reappear in the *Vit. Ant.* Both *Contra gentes* and

[68]See van den Hoek, "'Catechetical' School," 61; van den Broek, "The Christian 'School,'" 44–47.
[69]Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.19.14.
[70]Watts, *City and School*, 169–170.
[71]See Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.19.8.
[72]Watts, *City and School*, 175–177.

De incarnatione begin with a defense of the reasonable nature of Christianity against the charge that Christian faith was "irrational," ἄλογος.[73] In the introduction of *Contra gentes*, Athanasius writes that the revelation of scripture is "sufficient" for declaring the truth (exactly what Antony will teach his students in his first extended discourse). In his explication of a theology of the cross as the very manifestation of God's wisdom, in good Pauline form, Athanasius asserts that his intention is to demonstrate to the "Gentiles" who scoff at the cross that "faith in Christ" is not "unreasonable."[74] In fact, it is through the cross that the "knowledge of God" is made manifest. The decline of idolatry is proof that the power of God through Christ fills the world. Moreover, the power of the cross scatters demons.

Athanasius sets out to demonstrate the reasonableness of Christian faith by engaging his opponents in "reasonable arguments": "As our argument is not lacking in demonstrative proof, come let us put them also to shame on reasonable grounds."[75] Thus, Athanasius willingly participates in the philosophical game, or better, competition, utilizing skills and resources (literacy, education, a position of authority) that made his entry of consequence. Furthermore, his very participation in such a project required him both to invest covertly in the cultural capital that fueled and drove the competition, while overtly challenging the basic principles of the game and proposing a Christian "heterodox" alternative to the dominant Greek "orthodoxy." This alternative was founded not only on the revelation of God in scripture, but also on a natural revelation inherent in the human intellect. As such, there was no express need for teachers or schools: "The knowledge (γνῶσις) of the worship of God and the truth about the universe is received not so much from the teaching of human beings, as much as it is intelligible by itself."[76]

Athanasius contends that knowledge of truth and virtue does not require study of Greek philosophical texts in Greek institutions of education—in fact, it would preclude this, as these all have been corrupted by the error of idolatry, rendering them insufficient. Therefore, his alternative proposal is one that is comprehensive, suggesting that Christians devote themselves to a

[73]Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 28. The characterization of Christianity as ἄλογος, "irrational," or "without reason," goes back to Celsus (Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.9). Christian intellectual apologists from Origen to Eusebius (*Praeparatio evangelica* 1.5.2) to Athanasius defended their doctrines against this charge by providing "reasonable" arguments supporting the central *revealed* tenets of the Christian faith, such as the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. In *Inc.* 41, Athanasius once again states that his purpose is to convince the Greeks of the truth of the doctrine of the incarnation by using "reasonable arguments."

[74]*C. gent.* 1.3.

[75]*Inc.* 41.

[76]*C. gent.* 1.1 (trans. mine).

different canon of authoritative texts, different institutions, and different teachers: the Old and New Testaments replaced the Dialogues of Plato as sufficient definitive texts;[77] Hebrew prophets, Christian apostles and authors, instead of Greek philosophers, formed the authoritative doctrinal and interpretive traditions;[78] and, finally, the activity of the Triune God, especially in the incarnation of the Son, rather than allegorized Greek myths, provided the narrative of salvation. As a teacher, Athanasius provides his students with arguments to be used in their own participation in this cultural competition. E. P. Meijering thus regarded these companion apologetic works as "an elementary education in the Christian faith," a στοιχείωσις, as Athanasius himself terms it at *De incarnatione* 56.[79] Athanasius does not simply supply rational arguments, but constructs an alternative philosophical program, which, in conversation with a competing philosophical culture, both built upon and refuted it, in a process of building a Christian *paideia*. At once engaged in fundamental philosophical discussions of his day and disengaged from the schools and circles of the Greeks, Athanasius envisioned a Christian philosophy that was "meaner," accessible to men and women, Greeks and non-Greeks, rich and poor—and not confined to the narrow circles of senatorial families who had the means and luxury of educating their sons in the rhetorical and philosophical schools of important centers such as Athens, Rome, and his own Alexandria. Athanasius boldly (and rashly) declared that the sun had set on the Greeks, boasting that the dominance of the Greek philosophers had come to an end. Their philosophy would be replaced by the true doctrine (διδασκαλία [*De incarnatione* 51]) revealed in scripture, and, especially, in the incarnation and cross of Christ:

> The Greek philosophers have compiled many works with persuasiveness and much skill in words; but what fruit have they to show for this such as has the cross of Christ? … Even in their lifetime their seeming influence was counterbalanced by their rivalry … But the Word of God, by strangest paradox, teaching in meaner language, has put the choicest sophists in the shade, and by confounding their teachings and drawing all to himself, he has filled his own assemblies (ἐκκλησίας).[80]

[77]See for example, *C. gent.* 1.10 (scripture is sufficient for truth); 45–46 (scripture alone, as revelation, confirms all reasonable arguments). A similar theme is expressed by Antony in his inaugural sermon to the monks: τὰς μὲν γραφὰς ἱκανὰς εἶναι πρὸς διδασκαλίαν (*Vit. Ant.* 16.1).

[78]*C. gent.* 1.10 (The writings of the "blessed" [μακαρίων] teachers aid in the interpretation of scripture); 2.4 (The "holy man" [ὁ ἅγιος] Paul as ethical model); 35.19 (The "theologians" [θεολόγων ἀνδρῶν], including Paul, teach on the immortality of the soul, creation of the world, revelation of God, etc.).

[79]Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism*, 107.

[80]*Inc.* 50.

Corrupted by idolatry, Greek wisdom could not lead to virtue, as the very gods it professed acted irrationally and were slaves to their passions.[81] No allegorizing of myth could erase this indelible embarrassment to the Greeks.[82] As such, Athanasius declared the disappearance of the "wisdom of the world" (*De incarnatione* 46; 55), citing as proof the "wise" (probably educated Greek converts), who were turning away from Greek philosophy to devote their studies to the gospels (*De incarnatione* 53). A Christian philosophy would still need models and exemplars, but these were now virgins, monks, and martyrs, whom Athanasius calls the students of Christ (*De incarnatione* 48). They were "proofs" of the truth of the teaching of Christ, who "has by his godhead confounded and overshadowed the opinions of the poets and the delusion of the daemons and the wisdom of the Greeks."

Athanasius outlined a vision of an alternative Christian philosophy *and* philosophical culture in his tracts *Contra Gentes* and *On the Incarnation*. In the context of a Constantinian and post-Constantinian era, Athanasius's proposal posed real challenges to the established philosophical orthodoxies of the previous Roman regimes.

IV. The Life of Antony and Greek *Paideia*

In the light of these arguments, I suggest that the figure of Antony in the *Vit. Ant.* serves, in part, to challenge the dominance of Greek *paideia* and to propose an alternative Christian learning aimed at wisdom and virtue. I do not see this as the only purpose of the *Vit. Ant.*, but as one element of a comprehensive strategy on Athanasius's part to promote ascetic Christianity and to defend Christian orthodoxy against groups such as the Arians and Meletians. I believe, however, that this move against the Greeks is often overlooked. While the preface and closing of the work are addressed to Christian ascetics, a non-Christian audience is also envisioned:

[81]Athanasius cites the Wisdom of Solomon 14:12–16 to demonstrate that the deification of the passions and the eventual fall of humanity into idolatry was explained by scripture. Cf. Romans 1:18–32. For this section of Romans understood as a narrative of "decline" explaining the origins of Greek civilization, see Stanley Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994), 83–125.

[82]*C. gent.* 13–14. These chapters attack the practice of "idolatry" as a hindrance to virtue. This argument is taken up again in *Vit. Ant.* 37. In *Vit. Ant.* 76, Antony criticizes the Greek practice of allegorizing myths. Plato also criticized the allegorical interpretation of myths (*Resp*. 376) and was embarrassed by the behavior of the gods (*Resp*. 378b–c).

> And if there is need, read it also to the Gentiles (ἐθνικοῖς), so that they will know that not only is our Lord Jesus Christ God and Son of God, but even that those who worship him sincerely and piously believe in him, the Christians, not only prove (ἐλέγχουσιν) that the daemons whom the Greeks consider gods, are not gods, but they trample and chase them away as deceivers and corrupters of human beings.[83]

This is an audience that would include the intellectual elite who were the target of Athanasius's earlier works. Abandoning the approach of previous Christian biographers who found a certain usefulness in Greek wisdom in their competitive exchanges with opponents, Athanasius indicates from the very beginning of his account of the life of Antony that Greek education played no role in the monk's attainment of wisdom and virtue. As a youth, he "could not bear to learn letters" (γράμματα μὲν μαθεῖν οὐκ ἠνέσχετο [*Vit. Ant.* 1.2]) and refused the education that would have set him on the path to social mobility. Instead, Antony learns from Christian scripture (*Vit. Ant.* 2–3); and in his first lecture to his followers, he teaches them that scripture is sufficient (ἱκανάς) for "instruction" (πρὸς διδασκαλίαν) (*Vit. Ant.* 16.1).[84] Bankrupting the cultural and philosophical value of Greek "letters" (γράμματα), this assertion of Antony (which echoes the view of Athanasius) invests the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom in Christian scripture, the direct revelation of God's wisdom, rather than the corrupted pseudo-wisdom of the philosophers. It is significant that Athanasius's model of wisdom and virtue is an uneducated Copt who does not speak Greek, and who requires a translator when debating his philosopher opponents. These narrative and rhetorical strategies served to drive a dissimulating wedge between Antony and the linguistic, practical, and conceptual worlds of Greek intellectual culture.

I believe we can already see the complexity of Athanasius's approach. While it may, in fact, betray a suspicion of what has been termed "academic Christianity," that is, organized communities engaged in textual study under the guidance of a teacher and influenced by Greek intellectual culture, his rejection was not absolute.[85] Athanasius can compete with his opponents precisely because he seeks to redefine their models. Furthermore, with his invitation to the "Gentiles," an attempt to attract Greek intellectuals to invest their souls and their skills into the Christian intellectual project, Athanasius was compelled to adopt arguments and strategies that could convince his

[83] *Vit. Ant.* 94.2 (trans. mine).

[84] See also *C. gent.* 1; *Ep. de Synodis* 6; *Ep. ad episcopos Aegypti et Libyae* 4.

[85] David Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 254–255.

intellectual competitors that Christianity was a logical and viable alternative to Greek systems and circles of learning.[86]

While Antony's formation occurs outside of Greek institutions, it still bears resemblance to the Greek way in two respects: the attachment to a teacher and, relatedly, the mimetic dynamic of education.[87] It was not uncommon for the sons of the Roman aristocracy in Late Antiquity to travel to important centers, such as Athens, Alexandria, and Constantinople, to study with renowned experts and teachers in rhetoric and philosophy. In the *Laws*, Plato regards proper *paideia* as that which shapes and molds young men into the best of men, producing good and perfected citizens of the state.[88] To pursue education for any other reason than the perfection of virtue, such as for wealth, was a "vulgar" and "unworthy" pursuit. Antony, too, like the other young men of his time, left home to seek out great teachers, but he sought them not among the interpreters of Pythagoras or Plato. Nor did he travel to distant lands, not even to Alexandria.[89] "The Greeks leave home and cross the sea in order to be educated," Antony informs his students, "but we have no need to leave home for the kingdom of heaven or to cross the sea for virtue" (*Vit. Ant.* 20.4). Antony shuns the cities and their schools in search of the desert teachers who lived on the fringes of civilized society (*Vit. Ant.* 3.3–4 & 4.1). This is a violent separation of the pursuit and acquisition of wisdom and virtue from the experts and institutions normally associated with their cultivation. Through the figure of Antony, Athanasius asserts that virtue is not dependent on *paideia*. It is not bound to the embrace of Hellenism, nor is it the proper domain of Greek teachers. Instead, Antony, an uneducated (but not necessarily illiterate[90]) Copt, is able to cultivate a virtue that is natural to his human nature through his encounters with the enigmatic "pre-monks," from whom he collects various virtues, like Pythagoras before him, to assemble them into a perfect Christian system[91]: graciousness (τὸ χαρίεν),

[86]Rubenson, "Philosophy and Simplicity," 111–113.

[87]M. L. Clarke, *Higher Education in the Ancient World* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1971), 86.

[88]Plato, *Leg.* 1.643e–644b.

[89]See Watts, *City and School, passim*, on the history and culture of these important educational centers in the Late Antique world.

[90]It is important to emphasize that Antony is not portrayed as "illiterate," but as unschooled. His distaste for γράμματα is a rejection of Greek schooling, not reading per se ("learning" is the sense of the word in Plato *Ap.* 26d). In the world of the *bios*, Antony refers to the practice of reading scripture (for example, *Vit. Ant.* 25.2). Rubenson calls the notion of the "illiterate" Antony a "late prejudice" (*Letters of St. Antony*, 185). Indeed, if the letters attributed to Antony are authentic, a case Rubenson makes strongly, then he was far from illiterate!

[91]This is one of several passages that Rubenson has identified as having direct parallels to the biographical tradition of Pythagoras. Building on and correcting the philological approach of Richard Reitzenstein (*Das Athanasius Werk über das Leben des Antonius. Ein philologischer Beitrag zur Geschichte des Mönchtums* [Heidelberg: Carl Winters, 1914]), Rubenson regards the *Vit. Ant.* as "an apologetic anti-Pythagorean … treatise." He maintains that Athanasius had knowledge of and drew from the Pythagorean biographies of Porphyry, and perhaps Iamblichus, while at the same time engaging and criticizing the models of the "holy man" that each of these

intensity (τὸ σύντονον) in prayer, freedom from anger (τὸ ἀόργητον), the love of humanity (τὸ φιλάνθρωπον), watchfulness (τὸ ἀγρυπνεῖν), the love of words (τὸ φιλολογεῖν), patient endurance (καρτερία), fasting (νηστεία), sleeping on the ground (χαμευνία), gentleness (πραότης), long-suffering (μακροθυμία), piety (εὐσέβεια), and love toward others (τὴν πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἀγάπην). He admires the zeal of their ascetic practice, their prayer vigils, and their study of scripture.[92]

As to the inherent nature of virtue, the uneducated Antony echoes the sentiments of his biographer. "All virtue needs, then, is our willing, since it is in us [referring to Luke 17:21], and arises from us. For virtue exists when the soul maintains its intellectual part (τὸ νοερόν) according to nature (κατὰ φύσιν)" (*Vit. Ant.* 20.5). He continues: "The task is not difficult: if we remain as we came into being, then virtue is with us, but if we think about bad things, we are judged as evil" (*Vit. Ant.* 20.8). Similarly, in the *Contra gentes*, Athanasius had maintained that the path to the kingdom is within every rational creature by virtue of possession of a rational soul:[93] "The road to [God] is neither far from us nor outside of us. But it is within us" (*Contra gentes* 30). God can be seen and known by the human soul and reason, and even the Greeks have the capability of knowing the true God and his will.[94] Yet, their philosophy and education prohibits them from true knowledge of God because it has been corrupted by idolatry. This corruption sits so deeply within Greek literature, culture, and thought that the Greeks have separated themselves from God and plunged themselves into vice, evident within the very structures of Roman government and society. The result is enslavement

texts present on the issue of the "source" of wisdom and holiness. I think it is difficult to ascertain how much these parallels are related on a textual level and how much they are familiar tropes. While I would not limit Athanasius's polemic to one directed against Neopythagoreans, but against a broader, competing, and developing Greek philosophical tradition (which certainly had Pythagorean sympathies), I do think Rubenson is correct in reading the text as part of the larger philosophical debate of the period: Samuel Rubenson, "Antony and Pythagoras: A Reappraisal of the Appropriation of Classical Biography in Athanasius' *Vita Antonii*," in *Beyond* Reception*: Mutual Influences between Antique Religion, Judaism, and Early Christianity*, ed. David Brakke et al., 191–208. Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006).

[92]In Porphyry's *Life of Pythagoras*, the founding father of philosophy is educated among the "barbarians," collecting skills and knowledge from foreign and exotic peoples—from the Egyptians, he learned geometry; from the Phoenicians, the science of numbers and mathematics; from the Magi, the rites of the gods; and from the Chaldeans, he learned the art of contemplating the sky. Thus, Pythagoras was a collector of scattered wisdom who organized a complete Greek system: see Porphyry, *Vit. Pyth.* 6–7.

[93]Anatolios, *Athanasius* 189.

[94]*C. gent.* 34: "For just as they turned away from God with their mind and invented gods out of nothing, so they can rise towards God with the mind of their soul and again turn back towards him."

to irrationality, the very charge leveled against Christians.[95] And the tables are turned.

Antony, instead, progresses successfully on the path to virtue through a co-working, συνεργία, with the incarnate Word, from whom he derives his "activity in holiness."[96] Through faith, and a turning of his mind (νοῦς) toward its natural focus—contemplation of God through the Word—Antony becomes receptive to the divine power of the Word, which aids and cooperates with his natural, internal capacity toward virtue: "But Antony, reflecting on Christ in his heart (ἐνθυμούμενος) and the goodness he had through him, and reflecting on the spiritual insight given to him by his soul (τὸ νοερόν), extinguished the Devil's deceitful coals" (*Vit. Ant.* 5). Khaled Anatolios describes this as "Christic virtue" and is careful to explain that Athanasius's assertion that virtue is internal to the human person, "within us," and that all that is necessary for virtue is "our willing," is not to claim that virtue is achieved apart from divine assistance; rather, "through the incarnation, what naturally belongs to God and was historically effected through the agency of the Incarnate Word becomes in some sense ascribable to us as subjects, through grace."[97] It is through Christ as teacher and revealer of wisdom, model and aid in virtue, that Antony becomes a true philosopher.

V. Competing with the Philosophers

Athanasius's polemic against Greek *paideia* takes on a narrative form in Antony's confrontations with philosophers. These encounters are part of a larger narrative unit that refutes unorthodox doctrines and groups. In these episodes, Athanasius presents Antony as "unschooled," but ever skilled to converse with ease on philosophical topics, mastering technical jargon and debating nuanced philosophical points. He both impresses and shames his opponents. Without having set foot in a school in the intellectual capital of Alexandria or picking up a text of Plato—even without knowing the Greek language—Antony demonstrates the intellectual and rhetorical skills of a highly trained philosopher. What we see here is a modification of the trope of the wise, uneducated peasant, who displays an "ethical superiority" to the urban intellectual.[98] His is a knowledge of God that derives from the seeds of wisdom inherent in his rational soul and perfected by the guidance and assistance of God through prayer, ascetical practice, and the reading of

[95]*C. gent.* 29.5.
[96]Anatolios, *Athanasius* 181.
[97]Ibid., 194.
[98]See Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature*, 104–105, where the author discusses examples in Philostratus and Longus.

scripture.[99] Thus, the true philosopher, that is, the Christian philosopher, need not, and ought not, turn to the corrupted and irrational Greek schools, teachers, and texts; but needs only to turn inward, to find inside his or her own self that which the Greeks sought elsewhere.

The first round of the competition begins at *Vit. Ant.* 72. Even before Antony's opponents appear, we learn that this unschooled Coptic hermit who casts out demons is also "extremely wise" (φρόνιμος . . . λίαν), "shrewd" (ἀγχίνους),[100] and "intelligent" (συνετός). Antony is a philosopher inwardly, but outwardly he is not—at least according to the standards of the period. The opposite can be said of his interlocutors. This is significant, because when his philosopher competitors arrive to "put Antony to the test," they are immediately recognizable as visual icons of Greek philosophical culture. They bear the *external* image of the philosopher and represent visually aristocratic Greek intellectual culture. Antony knows them "from their appearance" (ἐκ τοῦ προσώπου), probably a reference to the characteristic dress of the philosopher—the τρίβων (which Tertullian had re-tailored!). But it becomes readily apparent who the wise man truly is. This contrast of external appearance and internal state participates in a critique of would-be philosophers who do violence to the vocation with their attraction to fame and wealth.[101]

This first exchange is very brief, and deliberately incorporates echoes of the Pauline dichotomy of wisdoms. Through an interpreter (and again we are reminded of Antony's distance from respectable Greek philosophical culture), Antony addresses his visitors: "Why do you trouble yourselves, philosophers, coming to see such a foolish (μωρόν) person?" (*Vit. Ant.* 72). They politely disagree and assure Antony that he is indeed wise (φρόνιμον). Seizing on their recognition of his wisdom, and in the form of a good Greek teacher, Antony urges them (as students) toward *mimêsis*: "If you think I am wise, become like me, for we ought to imitate what is good . . . Become like me: I am a Christian."[102] The philosophers depart in amazement without responding.

The second brief encounter (*Vit. Ant.* 73) moves the discussion from the identification of the wise man to a philosophical dialogue on the relationship between intellect (νοῦς) and letters (γράμματα). Once again, through the speech of the unschooled Antony, Athanasius challenges both the adequacy

[99]It is through prayer and ascetical practices that Antony is open to, receives, and cooperates with the divine power of Christ, his "co-worker" (συνεργός), and turns his mind back to the contemplation of God that was the original activity of Adam: see Anatolios, *Athanasius* 189.

[100]Athena describes Odysseus in this way at *Od.* 13.332; Plato at *Leg.* 747b—mathematics awakes the dull and makes them "shrewd."

[101]For discussion of a similar strategy in Lucian, see Nasrallah, "Mapping," 295–296.

[102]Cf. 1 Cor. 11:1; 3 John 11.

of the standard course of Greek education for coming to knowledge of God, and the authority and legitimacy of such institutions. This challenge is a radical one. An education in "letters" was not simply a matter of advanced philosophical studies, but referred instead to the basic grammatical and rhetorical training any man needed for upward mobility in society. Nevertheless, we can see this tension: behind this rejection of "letters" by the narrative icon of Antony is the voice and pen of Athanasius, the educated bishop of Alexandria, who had studied "letters" and philosophy, and who now in some measure speaks through Antony as heir of his legacy and transmitter of his memory.

Anticipating ridicule for his lack of education, Antony questions the philosophers on the cause of "letters," inquiring whether the intellect produces letters, or vice versa. Without hesitation, the Greeks respond that the intellect is the source and inventor of letters. Antony concludes, "The person whose mind is sound (ὑγιαίνει), therefore, has no need of letters" (*Vit. Ant.* 73.3). That is to say, a sound intellect is one that is maintained in accordance with its natural, created state. When the intellect remains focused on its origins and destination, that is, its source and end (God), it will remain untainted and healthy. Again, echoing the opening chapters of Athanasius's *Contra gentes*, Antony will demonstrate, in the next exchange with the philosophers, how polytheism and idolatry have corrupted the Greek intellect and bred confusion. With these serious, inherent flaws, Greek education is not only problematic, it is both a result of humanity's falling away from God *and* that which transmits error and vice, generation after generation—in short, Greek education not only preserved and transmitted philosophical and theological errors, but it facilitated the reproduction of a dominant culture and produced individuals whose minds, and thus their views of reality, were shaped according to these errors. It is not simply that Christians ought to avoid reading about the sexual escapades of the Homeric gods. The challenge is much more serious, and the charge much more radical. If the educational system proposes and inculcates false claims on the nature of God, participation in it endangers one's movement toward union with God, as "letters" will corrupt the mind. What is more, since it is this system of education that reproduces the structures of society and shapes the "minds" of the individuals who rule, Hellenism has produced a society under the reign of irrational minds.[103]

The philosophers depart, reflecting on how this encounter with Antony has challenged their assumptions about the good life. First, they are amazed that they had found "such great understanding (σύνεσιν) in an unlettered person." Second, they are astonished by Antony's "character": "Although Antony had been raised on that mountain, as it were, and had grown old

[103]Cf. *C. gent.* 8.

there, his character was not wild; instead, he had the graces of someone raised in the city. His speech was seasoned with divine salt" (*Vit. Ant.* 73.4). Eusebius's account of the life of Origen had attempted to accentuate the social respectability and philosophical legitimacy of the Christian intellectual by emphasizing how he was *like* Greek philosophers, not simply in character, but also in *habitus*, that is, in skills and dispositions. Athanasius, however, rejects this approach, and demonstrates how much the true Christian philosopher is *unlike* his Greek counterparts, at least culturally. The figure of Antony offers a paradigm of a Christian philosopher who is at once detached from the cultural capital, institutions, and dispositions of the Greek philosopher, yet successful in attaining the philosophical *telos* his Greek competitors fail to achieve.

The final dialogue (*Vit. Ant.* 74–80) between Antony and "those among the Greeks who suppose themselves wise" brings the entire sequence to a climax. It is an especially interesting demonstration of cultural competition in which Athanasius employs both polemical and apologetic strategies that articulate a Christian stance toward the dominant philosophical culture. This section, in particular, resonates harmoniously with both the *Contra gentes* and *De incarnatione*, and approaches questions of language, philosophical vocabulary, method of argumentation, epistemology, and mythological narrative. Here the tension arises in Antony's critique of "argumentation" (ἀπόδειξις), an important skill for anyone trained in philosophy. Of course, Antony's criticism is that his opponents rely on fancy verbal sophistry, rather than on the expression of truth. The desert father does not debate, but simply speaks, commanding the attention of a captive audience—both the philosophers and the readers of the *Life*. His teaching is dotted with "argumentative speech." It is replete with the specialized language of the philosophical field. Thus, in some sense, the unlettered hermit can command a position on the field of play, equipped as he is with the knowledge and skills of his competitors.

In the figure of Antony, the lover of truth is detached from his cultural and social foundations. Put simply, it is an attempt to "get the Greek out," to demonstrate that the successful acquisition of wisdom and virtue is not limited by either cultural (read, Hellenic) or social boundaries. Though Antony's relatively technical philosophical lecture is spoken through an interpreter (*Vit. Ant.* 77.1), the reader (at least the reader of the Greek *Life*) reads Antony in *Greek*—his biographer having "re-translated" his "lesson." In this way, Athanasius violently detaches "language purism," what Swain has called "a badge of elite," Hellenic identity, from the identification of the philosopher, while affirming Antony's linguistic capital in his ability to engage in, and triumph, in the discussion.[104] While Antony appears as a

[104]Swain, *Hellenism and Empire*, 64.

teacher who captivates and commands his audience, bearing the pedagogical authority of a teacher who communicates and lives the philosophy he professes, he does not teach in an urban school with an endowed chair, enjoying the benefits of the intellectual's life in urban centers. Rather, Antony inhabits a city of another sort, one far removed from the cities of the philosophers culturally and ideologically, as well as geographically.

Having explicitly critiqued the Greek method of dialectic and, implicitly, the social and cultural *habitus* and location of the Greek philosophers, Antony's discourse turns to a lengthy discussion of core philosophical and theological questions. It is not my intention here to discuss these matters in detail. Rather, it is worth noting how this narrative unit of the *Vit. Ant.*, which, I have argued, is an example of how the *bios* served as an arena for the cultural competition for philosophy, reaches its zenith here. Once Athanasius, through the figure of Antony, has challenged the culturally dominant image of the authoritative (Greek) philosopher and the pedagogical route that formed and legitimated him, he outlines the central doctrines of a Christian philosophy, with a typical Athanasian emphasis on the incarnation and the cross of Christ. Here the tables are dramatically turned on the Greeks, as Antony demonstrates that these central Christian beliefs, which the Greeks considered "irrational," actually reveal a completely pure and rational knowledge of God that leads to virtue. The cross, he explains, is "a sign of courage and proof that we look upon death with contempt" (*Vit. Ant.* 74.3).[105] It is not a reason for ridicule, but a sign that stands at the center of a complete and coherent Christian wisdom. The myths of the Greeks, on the other hand, even when understood allegorically, depict the gods as slaves to their passions, and thus are useless models of the virtuous life. Regarding the incarnation, Antony asks, which is more irrational, to assert that the Word of God participated in human nature in order that human beings might participate in the divine nature, or to "liken God to irrational beings?"[106] "For these are the objects of worship of wise men like yourselves!"

We should not overlook the fact that this attack confronts the established philosophical orthodoxy on its own terms. That is, despite the scathing assault, Athanasius does not discard typically Platonic doctrines altogether; nor does he reject the specialized language of the philosophical field. Simply put, what we do not see here is a total disengagement on the part of Athanasius, despite the claims that there is one. We do not see, to propose a fictional example, something like the author of the biblical book of Revelation refuting Platonic doctrine in a completely different conceptual,

[105]τὸ μὲν γὰρ παρ' ἡμῖν λεγόμενον ἀνδρείας ἐστὶ τεκμήριον, καὶ καταφρονήσεως θανάτου γνώρισμα· τὰ δὲ ὑμέτερα ἀσελγείας ἐστι πάθη. Cf. *De incarnatione* 47.

[106]The echoes of Rom. 1 are abundantly evident.

cultural, and semantic world. The late Roman world of ideas and perceptions was still permeated and dominated by a Platonic view of reality, even if it was not always perceived as such. Athanasius "negotiates" the terms and meanings of the debate by appealing to the revelation of Christian scripture:

> It is clear to me that you are doing yourselves harm by not sincerely acquainting yourselves with scripture. But acquaint yourselves with them and see that the things Christ did [crucifixion, resurrection, healing, and nature miracles] demonstrate that he is God, who dwelt among us for the salvation of humankind.[107]

Antony's monologue continues—his visitors speechless. This Christian philosopher has clearly convinced his opponents of the truth of his arguments. He smiles and declares, "These beliefs of yours are self-evidently refuted" (*Vit. Ant.* 77.1). The teacher now turns to basic epistemological questions. The Greek charge that Christianity was ἄλογος was both philosophical and epistemological; that is, both *what* Christians believed and *why* they believed were deemed irrational. The Christian appeal to revelation and faith was seen by the philosophers as a blind acceptance of irrational principles without any critical, rational inquiry. In this last major section of the *Vit. Ant.*'s refutation of the established philosophical orthodoxy, Antony discusses a dichotomy between "the working of faith" (ἡ ἐνέργεια πίστεως) and "demonstration through arguments" (ἡ διὰ λόγων ἀπόδειξις): "How is reality accurately discerned, and especially the knowledge of God?" (*Vit. Ant.* 77.3).

This is where Athanasius, through the figure of Antony, applies an understanding of Paul's dichotomy of wisdoms that regards the "wisdom of God" as the working of faith, and the "wisdom of the world" as demonstration through arguments. We should be careful, however, not to read a modern dichotomy of faith versus reason into Athanasius's position. Reason is not discarded. Rather, the revelation found in the inspired scriptures constitutes the principles of a natural rationality, defined as the condition of the human intellect as possessed by Adam before the fall to which one returns once purified of the errors of idolatry.[108] True knowledge is not deduced from reason alone, but stems first from the revelation of scripture, apprehended through reason.[109] While Antony will conclude that in the end dialectic is "superfluous," it is precisely through argumentation that he defeats the false knowledge of his opponents. And this is the key.

[107] *Vit. Ant.* 75.

[108] At *C. gent.* 2, Athanasius describes Adam as a philosopher, created for contemplation and for knowing likeness to God.

[109] At *C. gent.* 45b–46, Athanasius argues that the revelation found in scripture confirms reasonable arguments.

On this point, Antony corners the philosophers into admitting that the working of faith precedes the demonstration of argument. Knowledge derived from faith is a disposition (διάθεσις) of a soul in accord with nature, and assisted by God. Argumentation, on the other hand, is a skill (τέχνη) that is learned, and which can be used to defend irrational and false ideas—as the Greeks themselves did. Thus, the art of argumentation, a part of the treasure trove of the cultural capital acquired in Greek circles, is understood negatively, and bankrupted of its value. The ability to develop rational arguments may demonstrate a person's skill, but it was unnecessary for a well-ordered and virtuous soul. It was also unnecessary for true knowledge of God, which is supplied through revelation and faith (*Vit. Ant.* 77.3). Christians "know" truth through faith. They do not discover it or "construct" it through the argumentation of words. Those who rely on Platonic dialectic to discover truth will find that they are unable even to "perceive" (φράσαι) what Christians have secure knowledge of through the working of faith.

In the conclusion of these encounters, Athanasius attempts to shift cultural capital away from the eloquent Greek to the Christian man of actions. He does it, of course, through crafted argumentation. With the basis for knowledge rooted in faith as a disposition of soul, Antony has achieved through "Christianity" what the philosophers were unable to achieve through "Hellenism," terms used in the text itself (*Vit. Ant.* 78). Christian *pistis* is proposed as a superior alternative to Greek *sophia* and the basis for "true worship" (*Vit. Ant.* 80). Antony notes that the appearance of Christianity has heralded the decline of the worship of Greek gods. The spread of Christianity is a prelude to the disappearance of Greek philosophy (*Vit. Ant.* 78; cf. *De incarnatione* 46): "Your views perish, though acclaimed and celebrated far and wide. But the faith and teaching of Christ, ridiculed by you and persecuted frequently by rulers, has filled the world."[110] The proof of this lies in the virtuous lives, not of philosophers, but of the virgins and martyrs, the new caste of Christian philosophers (*De incarnatione* 48). Antony proves his own authority by casting out demons, those who had fooled the Greeks into believing they were gods and who had instilled irrationality in Greek culture. Ultimately it is this power, not his arguments, that convinces the philosophers.

VI. Conclusion

The Hellenistic period saw the development of the *bios* as a form of literary production that served as an arena for competing philosophical ideas and

[110] *Vit. Ant.* 79.

authorities. A resurgence in biographical literature in the third through fifth centuries C.E. attests to a renewed competition within philosophical circles. This competition differed, however, in that the competing factions were not only philosophical rivals, but also held conflicting theologies and religious allegiances. Despite these differences, however, the educated elite of the Christian and Greek parties shared enough in paideic formation that such a competition was possible.

It was also necessary. Conflict between Greek and Christian intellectuals over *paideia*, which I defined above as a molding and sustaining complex of ideas and practices that shaped the contours of the lives of the educated and afforded cultural and pedagogic authority, represented the continuation of a conversation that had begun generations earlier. Christians challenged the priority of the Hellenic past, which Greek intellectuals had canonized, not rejecting it absolutely in all cases, but relegating it to a secondary position, as prelude, or, in the case of Athanasius, corruption, of a Hebraic past. This was a challenge to the pedagogic authority of the Greeks and the privileges it received in the forms of economic and symbolic capital from the imperial purse and other aristocratic benefactors. In a post-persecution, post-Constantinian age, before there were any formal institutions of Christian education, Athanasius's *Life of Antony* locates the center of intellectual and moral learning and formation in the Church, under the guidance of monks and bishops, through the nourishment of the scriptures, according to the Nicene creed, and in the transforming power of the Word made flesh. With the very structures of Gentile society plunged into corruption by false knowledge and idolatry, new generations of Christians could only turn to the Church for an authentic formation in the truth. There were no other alternatives.

Unlike the experiments of Eusebius in philosophical biography, which emphasized the cultural commonalities Christian intellectuals, such as Origen and Pamphilus, shared with their Greek rivals, Athanasius emphasized radical difference. Athanasius's "discovery" of a Christian philosopher, in an unusual and unexpected place, was a harsh assessment of the value of Greek *paideia* in the pursuit of wisdom and virtue in general, and, practically speaking, in the life of the Christian. In his *bios* of Antony of Egypt, Athanasius promoted a paradigm of the philosopher who appeared on the surface to be the antithesis of the well-educated, socially respectable urban philosopher. This Christian philosopher was a provincial (and socially disdained) Coptic Egyptian who spoke no Greek, had not studied Plato, rejected the life of Hellenized cities, and removed himself from the schools. Yet, he possessed the intellectual and virtuous *habitus* of the philosopher, as this was understood in the fourth century. He had achieved the goal of philosophy in his contemplative union with God, physical asceticism, prayer, and study of Christian texts—and he was able to debate with the Greeks and

win. In short, Athanasius provided a model of the philosopher that distanced itself from the dominant philosophical culture through an overt strategy of disinterest. At the same time, he covertly invested in the values and skills of philosophical culture to promote Antony as a philosophical pedagogue, and himself, the biographer, as heir and guardian of that tradition.

Athanasius's *Life of Antony* met with far-reaching success. By 373, two Latin translations were available, one by Evagrius, the other anonymous. A Persian Syriac version based on a "copticizing Greek" version, different than the standard Greek version, appeared in the fifth or sixth century.[111] For many Christian intellectuals, the *Vit. Ant.* provided a standard for practical virtue and a viable alternative for thinking about the role of education in moral formation. It also offered a literary paradigm: Jerome, Sulpicius Severus, and Paulinus of Milan all consciously modeled their own biographical literature on it. The *Vit. Ant.* also successfully presented Egyptian monasticism as a viable and attractive alternative to the classical philosophical life for the Christian *pepaideumenos*. Athanasius's exhortation to read his *bios* to the "Gentiles" should not be disregarded as naive or arrogant, as if it could only fall on uninterested or deaf ears. That is a modern bias speaking. The false conception that Christian and Greek intellectuals inhabited the same world in separate vacuums guides this bias—as it does some representations of the educational circles of the second through fourth centuries. Rather, if the work of Athanasius should be considered, as I have argued, a cultural production that served as an arena of competition over the classical philosophical tradition, then we ought to look for evidence of how non-Christian intellectuals responded to it.

In Book Eight of the *Confessions*, Augustine describes the impact the story of Antony had on young, Roman intellectuals such as himself. He links his own conversion to Christ to that of Ponticianus and other insiders to the imperial court, who, in imitation of the uneducated Copt, abandoned their positions of privilege for a life of poverty and contemplation.[112] That Athanasius's *bios* contributed to the conversions of Augustine and other young educated men from the wisdom of the world to the wisdom of God attests to the capability of the *Vit. Ant.* to communicate common convertible values to different segments of the educated elite of Late Antiquity.

[111]Bartelink, *Vie d'Antoine*, 95.
[112]See Augustine, *Conf.* 8.6.