

HAMARTIA, EVIL, AND DEITY IN
ARCHAIC AND CLASSICAL GREEK
THOUGHT

WILL DESMOND

“To forgive, and *not* to harm those who cause them harm, would be an injustice scarcely conceivable—let alone a virtue to be cultivated.”

Καὶ ἄφεσ ἡμῖν τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν, καὶ γὰρ αὐτοὶ ἀφίομεν παντὶ ὀφείλοντι ἡμῖν· καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν.

—Lk 11:4

“And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation.” The words are so well known that they can trip off the tongue without much reflection—about their theological weight or long linguistic history. And yet, this exhortation in the Lord’s Prayer touches on the deepest aspects of Christian faith: human sins and sinfulness, divine forgiveness, the call for mankind to imitate God’s mercy and agapeic generosity, and in such Christlike love to gain redemption from evil. Human imperfection, God’s loving forgiveness, salvation—the issues

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touched on here with such seeming simplicity go to the very
core of belief.

The exhortation is also in Greek, of course, and the
whole complex of themes is articulated in words that hail origi-
nally from a land and culture quite alien to Jesus’ Judaea. This ar-
ticle will focus mainly on one operative word, *hamartia*—Luke’s
original for “trespasses” or “sins”¹—and its cognates, from Homer
and early Greece down to the tragedians and philosophers of
Classical Athens. In their changing usage from Homer to the
gospels, these *hamartia* cognates are from the beginning bound up
with the Greeks’ tangled and shifting ideas about the relation be-
tween the human and the divine. Hence the single term *hamartia*
offers a window on their diverse ideas regarding human crimes,
guilt, and fallenness, divine justice and gifts, and even possible
theōsis. Throughout this essay I will try to balance a fidelity to
historical specificity with an openness to the possible resonances
with the gospels. Threading a way between sameness and differ-
ence, continuity and rupture, my recurrent theme will be that
pre-Christian Greek conceptions of sin are less developed than
the Christian. For throughout the *longue durée* of Greek religious
development, from early Archaic to late Classical Greece, reli-
gious and ethical life are only sporadically reconciled: there is no
Greek Decalogue, the gods do not legislate proper human behav-
ior in unambiguous ways, and even when their justice does ex-
tend to setting ethical imperatives for human beings, it remains
an ambiguous justice, as the gods in their sublime superiority re-
main profoundly alien to mankind. Plato’s theological revolution
also entails an ethico-religious reorientation: reacting against the
ethos of Homer and “tragic” Greece, and drawing out the ten-
dencies of Hesiod even more strongly, Plato may come closest to
the notion of a deity who seeks to elevate fallen mankind. Yet,
true to his own Greek past, not even Plato really countenances
the exhortation to forgive.

1. The words that St. Matthew uses for *trespasses* and *trespassers* are
ὀφειλήματα and *ὀφειλέταις*, literally “debts” and “debtors,” respectively—hence
St. Jerome’s fairly literal Latin equivalents, *debita* and *debitores* (*et dimitte nobis*
debita nostra, sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris), and indeed the literal ren-
dering of some Protestant versions (“and forgive us our debts, as we forgive
our debtors”). St. Luke’s use of both *ἡμαρτία* and forms of *ὀφείλω* may reflect
the greater literary artifice of his Greek.

1. *HAMARTIA* AND COGNATES: AN OVERVIEW

Let us begin by exploring in more detail the typical Archaic and Classical meanings and associations of the noun *hamartia*. Its verbal cognate, *hamartanein*, means, most literally, "to miss the mark," as for instance when shooting: warriors in Homer's *Troy* often throw spears that "miss" their target—or not; Nausicaa throws the ball and "misses" her playmate; Herodotus's Adrastus "misses" a boar with his javelin; a character in Aristophanes's *Wealth* wonders whether she has arrived at the house of Plutus, or, she asks, "have we missed the way entirely?"² Again, in a trial for murder, the legal speechwriter Antiphon argues that his young client did not "miss the target" in the gymnasium at all; what happened, rather, was that the victim ran *into* the javelin, and so was killed "through his own *hamartia*." For his part, the young defendant "would not have *erred* if nobody had run under the projectile."³

Antiphon's clever use of both verb and noun forms of *hamartia* more succinctly illustrates some of the meanings of its cognates, and displays how the literal meaning can blend into a more metaphorical sense: "to fail of one's purpose, to go wrong" or "to make a mistake." The metaphor of "missing" a "target" (*skopos*), whether an answer, idea, or final *telos*, enters into many epistemological and ethical discussions of Plato and Aristotle: like a bad "archer," false opinion or judgment "misses" and does not "hit" the right combination of concepts; knowledge can be defined as true opinion "without error"; deliberative "errors" occur (for Aristotle) regarding either universals or particulars; legislation often "misses" and does not "hit" the good or expedient goal; any discourse should begin with a definition of terms, for otherwise one "must go completely astray."⁴ Thus, the

2. See Homer's *Iliad* 10.372 (hereafter cited as *Il.*); on Adrastus, see Herodotus, *Histories* 1.43; on Nausicaa, see Homer's *Odyssey* 6.116 (ἀμφιπόλου μὲν ἄμαρτε) (hereafter cited as *Od.*), and on Aristophanes's lady, see Aristophanes: *Plutarch* 962 (ἢ τῆς ὁδοῦ τὸ παράπαν ἡμαρτήκαμεν).

3. Antiphon, *Tetralogies* 2, 4.5 (emphasis added) (τοῦ σκοποῦ ἄμαρτόν . . . διὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ ἄμαρτίαν δέδρακεν . . . ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἀφείς οὐδὲν ἂν ἡμαρτε).

4. Regarding judgment, see Plato's *Theaetetus* 189b12–c7 (ἄμαρτάνων οὐ ἐσκόπει δικάως ἂν καλοῖτο ψευδῆ δοξάζων), 19c36–194a5 (οἷον τοξότην φαῦλον ἰέντα παραλλάξει τοῦ σκοποῦ καὶ ἄμαρτεῖν, ὃ δὴ καὶ ψεῦδος ἄρα ὀνόμασται); cf.

COGNATES: AN OVERVIEW

in more detail the typical Archaic associations of the noun *hamartia*. Its , means, most literally, “to miss the shooting: warriors in Homer’s Troy miss” their targe—or not; Nausicaa her playmate; Herodotus’s Adrastus javelin; a character in Aristophanes’s e has arrived at the house of Plutus, used the way entirely?”² Again, in a scribe Antiphon argues that his “missed the target” in the gymnasium at all; that the victim ran *into* the javelin, his own *hamartia*.” For his part, the not have *erred* if nobody had run under

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physical meaning of the term that predominates in Homer often remains metaphorically operative in more philosophical abstract usage. With Plato and Aristotle, perhaps the most succinct and revealing lexical fact is that *hamartia* is most commonly paired with *orthotēs* as its twin and opposite: “error” and “rightness.”⁵ In turn, this cognitive connotation garners in Plato’s work an often more noticeably religious aura: in many passages, *hamartia* and cognates could be translated as “sin,” construed as crime against the divine. One almost offhand example in the *Phaedrus* illustrates this blending of cognitive (even technical), ethical, and religious registers: Lysias’s speech not only makes a “mistake” in rhetorical form (it begins without an essential definition), but also “sins” against divine eros; in imitating its content and ignoring the divine blessings of eros, Socrates’s first speech turns out to be a *hamartēma* for which he must seek purification.⁶

In all, Socrates’s playful banter here draws on the three main meanings of *hamartia* cognates—*miss the mark*, *go wrong* or *make a mistake*, and *sin*.⁷ Many other usages are more univocal, but the fact that Socrates can evoke and blend the various mean-

199b1–b5 (grabbing the wrong “bird” in the “aviary” of the mind) (hereafter cited as *Tht.*). Regarding knowledge, see *Tht.* 200e4–6 (ἀναμάρτητόν γέ ποῦ ἔστιν τὸ δοξάζειν ἀληθῆ). Regarding deliberation, see Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics 1142a20–22 (hereafter cited as *Eth. Nic.*). Regarding legislation, see *Tht.* 177e4–178a4; cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1094a23–24 (καθόπερ τοξόται σκοπὸν ἔχοντες μᾶλλον ἂν τυγχάνομεν τοῦ δέοντος). Regarding discourse, *logos*, see Plato’s *Phaedrus* 237b7–c3 (ἢ παντὸς ἁμαρτάνειν ἀνάγκη).

5. Among many other examples, see Plato’s *Euthydemus* 287e1–288a1, *Charmides* 173e7; *Cratylus* 387a6–8, 387b11–c4; *Protagoras* 340d7–8; *Gorgias* 488a2–b1 (hereafter cited as *Grg.*); *Republic* 339c1–5 (hereafter cited as *Resp.*); *Tht.* 146c4–5; *Philebus* 37e1–8; *Leges* 627d3, 668c5–8; and Aristotle’s *Topica* 111a15–18, *Eth. Nic.* 1142b7–12.

6. *Phaedrus* 242c1–d2 (of this and other ἁμαρτήματα εἰς τὸ θεῖον against which Socrates’s divine “voice” warns), 242d11–a5 (the two speeches ἡμαρτανέτην); cf. 235e3, 262e5 (Lysias’s technical “mistake”).

7. I basically follow the meanings given in Liddell & Scott’s *Greek-English Lexicon* (9th ed. [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996]), but I would separate the third meaning (“sin”) from the more cognitive second meaning (“go wrong,” “do wrong,” “make a mistake”), given their significantly different connotations. Similarly, Jan M. Bremmer’s threefold division into usages meaning “miss,” “err,” and “offend” does not capture the full semantic range, or the sense of “sin” as offence against the *divine* (*Hamartia: Tragic Error in the Poetics of Aristotle and in Greek Tragedy* [Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1969]).

ings suggests that they were not necessarily felt to be mutually exclusive by Plato or his readers.⁸ In his major study of the term, Jan Bremmer says that "it is hard to find one's way in the labyrinth of the implications of the apparently simple language of Plato."⁹ This is true, and Plato is exceptional—but not unique—in his polysemy, for many moments of cultural psychology can be labyrinthine when one delves deep enough. It would be impossible here to thread one's way through *all* the lanes and passageways of Greek culture across some five centuries, but in attempting to unravel at least some of the tangled associations of the term *hamartia*, I will be somewhat expansive in either quoting or referring to (seemingly) representative passages. The coexistence and sometimes even blending of different senses of *hamartia* is evident from the "beginning," for here Homer sets the stage, as he does for Greek religious mythology generally.

2. EARLY GREECE

The dominant form of Greek ritual was always animal sacrifice. So too, from Homeric beginnings, the gods' prime demand is the honor of sacrifice, and the withholding of this honor can be said to constitute the prime "sin" of traditional Greek religion. Thus, in the *Iliad*, Zeus defends Hector to Hera because he never "missed" giving a sacrifice.

Hera, do not be utterly consumed in anger against the gods.
For the honor of Achilles and Hector will not turn out the

8. In his survey of *hamartia* terms from Homer to the fourth century BC, Bremmer detects a "continuous semantic shift from the first category [*hamartia* cognates meaning 'miss'] via the second ['err'] to the third ['offend'], and the centre of gravity is from the fourth century onwards already in the third category; in the Septuagint and the New Testament *hamartanein* never occurs in its literal meaning, and even *dihamartanein* is used to denote sin (*Num.* 15, 22). In this continuous development Aristotle is the surprising exception" (Bremmer, *Hamartia*, 60). Succinct tables and comparative statistics reflect Bremmer's confidence in separating usages into one and *only* one of the three basic meanings. In many cases this may be justified, but it does abstract from the total linguistic reality and "feel"—which itself draws upon broader conceptual and cultural contexts: true not only of Platonic passages, but also Antiphon's *Second Tetralogy*, Homer's *Iliad* 24.64–70, among others.

9. Bremmer, *Hamartia*, 51.

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same. But Hector too, of all mortals here in Troy—Hector
is the most beloved to the gods. He is to me at least, since
he never *missed* appropriate gifts [*ἐπεὶ οὐ τι φίλων ἡμάρτανε
δῶρον*]. My altar never lacked its equal feast, its libations
and savor of burnt sacrifice. For this is the gift of honor
[*γέρας*] that we receive as our due share.¹⁰

The use of the term *hamartano* here is termed "rare" by Lid-
dell & Scott, who would translate it as "neglect": Hector has
not "neglected" the gifts that the gods expect as their rightful
honor (*geras*). This is true of course, but abstracts from the mul-
tiple meanings of this *hamartia* cognate. "Missing" due sacrifice
would make Hector hateful to the gods and earn their righteous
anger: more succinctly, it would be a "sin." The verb here clearly
verges on the notion of sin as action that violates divine law. Or
more precisely, what is potentially sinful here are acts of *omission*.
Omitting sacrifice is what displeases the gods, while Hector's
scrupulosity has at least endeared him to Zeus. One may notice,
in addition, the rather casual nature of Zeus's remarks: there is
no question of a determinate formulation (let alone a written
statement) of what sacrifices Zeus exactly wants—in contrast,
say, to Yahweh's scrupulosity in Leviticus. Subsequent centuries
of Greek religious practice would enact certain expectations of
which gods preferred which sacrifices and when, but beliefs were
diffuse and never centralized into a single statement of what not
to "miss."

There are other ways that the passage captures the dy-
namic of Homeric polytheism and its heirs. Omission of sacrifice
is a *hamartia* hateful to the gods, but the source of that hate lies
with the gods' own jealous natures, rather than in any faults, im-
perfections, or impurities felt by their human worshipers. Name-
ly, sacrifices such as Hector's are not performed to expiate human
"sins" or sinfulness, a theme that does not seem to overly pre-
occupy Homer. Similarly, Hector expresses his piety in animal
sacrifices (and *accompanying* words, presumably), but not in the
thoughts or *intentions* of the pious heart—in two of Augustine's
categories: *opera* and *ora*, but not *cor*, that is, in external "works"
but not internal "faith." Such a simple, frank outlook (common
perhaps in pre-Axial Age religions) is mirrored in Homer's gods.

10. *Il.* 24.64–70 (emphasis added) (translation mine).

They want their sacrifices, and they jealously defend their rank and privileges before perceived slights, whether from human beings or other deities. Hence the typical sociological explanation of Homer's deities: like Feuerbach's god, the Olympians are the projection and mirror image of the heroic society that produced them. Homer's aristocratic world of warrior-kings, with their retainers, smiths, bards, fighting, feasting, and glory, are all writ large in the life of Olympus, where the great gods too have their divine underlings, their squabbles, banquets, and bouts of boasting. The one crucial difference is that the gods ("the immortals") do not die, and so the wars and quarrels that prove so tragic on earth are in Olympus rather comic interludes in the endless divine soap opera.

Many outsiders (and Greek philosophers such as Xenophanes and Plato) have taken a skeptical attitude toward Homer's gods, who can seem so unserious, so unworthy of respect, let alone reverence. Yet in focusing on their *power*—so irresistible, unpredictable—Homer may name a central attribute of the divine generally. In their "aristocratic" superiority, the gods may requite human honors with favors—or they may not. Such an unequal, unpredictable relationship is a source of anxiety for frail mortals. Homer's style does not stress this anxiety: his peoples do not approach their deities on their knees, or in an atmosphere of *obvious* "fear and trembling." Nevertheless, the typical formula for a prayer betrays the anxiety of the fragile human being, uncertain of the gods' will or even of their concern. The typical Homeric prayer therefore begins with an invocation—sometimes a litany of names and sobriquets—to attract the deity's attention (which is not guaranteed), proceeds to a recitation of past honors accorded, and ends with a request. So the action of the *Iliad* launches forth from the fierce prayer of Chryses to his patron Apollo:

Hear me, Lord of the Silver Bow, who protects Chryses and Cilla the divine, and rules over Tenedos in your power—Sminthean Apollo! If ever I built a beautiful-roofed temple for you, or if I ever burned the fat thighs of bulls and goats for you, fulfill then my desire: for my suffering, let the Greeks pay by your arrows.¹¹

11. *Il.* 1.37–47 (translation mine).

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The atmosphere is remarkably foreign to that of the Lord's Prayer. Between servant priest and Lord Apollo there is no sense of the intimate love between a son and kind *Abba*. Nor is Apollo troubled by old Chryses's fierce call for vengeance: far from rebuking Chryses for failing to forgive the trespasses of Agamemnon (who refused to ransom his daughter), Apollo takes on his desire for vengeance as if it were his own, launching arrows of plague that kill many soldiers, as well as mules and dogs. Thus is Agamemnon punished by the deaths of innocents.¹² Moreover, the prayer is mainly transactional, even contractual. Implicit in the propitiatory invocation is the reminder to Apollo that Chryses has not "missed" any past sacrifices himself. Not having "sinned" or acted unpleasingly to Apollo, Chryses foists a certain hopeful expectation on Apollo that he *should* reciprocate.

This is of course not *stated*. Nevertheless, the anxiously optimistic hope that the gods *will* reciprocate favors can come to more conscious formulation. Take the statement of Phoenix (Achilles's foster-father) that the gods can be "won over" or "turned," even when one has "transgressed and sinned":

Achilles, tame your unruly spirit! You must not keep your heart so pitiless [νηλεὲς ἦτορ]. The gods too can themselves be turned [στρεπτοί]. Their excellence and honor and power is even greater. But them too human beings can win over by sacrifices and pleasing prayers, by libation and the savor of burnt sacrifice—by praying [λίσσόμενοι], when someone has overstepped the mark [ὑπερβήη] and sinned [ἀμάρτη].¹³

Phoenix goes on to personify Prayers (Λιταί) as aged daughters of Zeus, who limp slowly after Delusion (Ἄτη), bringing healing to the reverent, but interceding with Zeus to punish those who persist in wrongdoing. The immediate context of Phoenix's speech is the attempt to persuade Achilles to let bygones

12. The common soldiers were doubly innocent, in fact, for "all" shouted out their desire to "reverence priest Chryses and receive the glorious ransom" (*Il.* 1.22–23).

13. *Il.* 9.496–501 (translation mine). The lines became classic or quasi-canonical, quoted for instance by Plato's half brother Adeimantus, when he challenges Socrates to defend justice without reference to divine rewards or punishments (*Resp.* 364d2–e2; cf. 365e1–366a4).

be by-gones, and it is Achilles who is the immediate target of the central statement that "the gods too can themselves be turned," persuaded by sacrifice to overlook some past *hamartia*. Under the power of Delusion, Agamemnon has acted rashly, but now the Embassy comes with "prayers" and gifts to effect healing and reconciliation, with Phoenix exhorting Achilles to imitate the divine forgiveness (as it were) by accepting the offer. Achilles does not do so, of course, unable to let go of the sense of grievance at Agamemnon's "sin" against him.¹⁴ The petition does not "turn" the hero and demigod (son of Thetis), much to the bewilderment of Ajax, Diomedes, and the army at large. Achilles's shifting, ambivalent responses to the Embassy's "prayers" mirror on the human level the uncanny responses of many gods: Apollo (as we have seen) grants Chryses's petitionary prayer, but Zeus only *half* grants Achilles's requests for Patroclus, while in other scenes a deity may ignore an invocation altogether.¹⁵

Phoenix's prayer broaches the significant notion of divine powers bringing "healing" after some *hamartia*, reconciling the offended parties—a process that demands reverence, as if it could be personified in the guise of divine "Prayers, daughters of Zeus." Yet when Achilles rejects the Embassy's "prayers," there is little sense that Achilles has *sinned* against divine ordinances; on the contrary, he does so in keeping with the overarching "plan of Zeus." There are, however, significant moments when the gods issue decrees that human beings should obey: Achilles states that humans should best obey divine commands; Diomedes obeys

14. Achilles broods on Agamemnon's treachery and "sin" in *Il.* 9.375 (ἐκ γὰρ δὴ μὲν ἀπάτησε καὶ ἤλατεν). Achilles's verb *alitaino* is (along with its cognates) very strong, used "to decry irreligious, offensive behaviour" (Bremmer, *Hamartia*, 26). Bremmer goes further: the "semantic history [of *alitaino* and cognates] probably mirrors that of *hamartia*, moving from 'missing' [a target] to 'sin'" (ibid., 27). (One might add that ἀλιτρός can be used teasingly [*Od.* 5.182], analogous perhaps to the English "you old sinner!") The effect of Achilles's vocabulary and condemnation of Agamemnon is reinforced if Bremmer is right about the essential "identity of *ate* and *hamartia*: of delusion and wrong action, of divinely-wrought damage and human failure" through the "tragic" *Iliad*—as characters like Patroclus, Paris, Helen, Hector, Agamemnon, and Achilles himself recognize too late the *divine* sources of their delusion/error (Bremmer, *Hamartia*, 103–11).

15. On Zeus, see *Il.* 16.249–50. See also *Il.* 6.311, where Athena ignores Trojan prayers.

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les who is the immediate target of the gods too can themselves be turned, overlook some past *hamartia*. Under the emnon has acted rashly, but now the prayers" and gifts to effect healing and mix exhorting Achilles to imitate the were) by accepting the offer. Achilles unable to let go of the sense of grievance" against him.¹⁴ The petition does not god (son of Thetis), much to the be- edes, and the army at large. Achilles's ases to the Embassy's "prayers" mirror canny responses of many gods: Apollo Chryses's petitionary prayer, but Zeus requests for Patroclus, while in other an invocation altogether.¹⁵

roaches the significant notion of di- aling" after some *hamartia*, reconciling process that demands reverence, as if it e guise of divine "Prayers, daughters of rejects the Embassy's "prayers," there is as *sinned* against divine ordinances; on keeping with the overarching "plan of r, significant moments when the gods beings should obey: Achilles states that y divine commands; Diomedes obeys

emnon's treachery and "sin" in *Il.* 9.375 (ἐκ hilles's verb *alıtaino* is (along with its cognates) eligious, offensive behaviour" (Bremmer, *Ha-* mer: the "semantic history [of *alıtaino* and cog- *hamartia*, moving from 'missing' [a target] to d that *άλιτρός* can be used teasingly [*Od.* 5.182], sh "you old sinner!") The effect of Achilles's of Agamemnon is reinforced if Bremmer is ity of *ate* and *hamartia*: of delusion and wrong nage and human failure" through the "tragic" elus, Paris, Helen, Hector, Agamemnon, and late the *divine* sources of their delusion/error

50. See also *Il.* 6.311, where Athena ignores

Athena; to break an oath is a "sin," and not to obey one's elders may be associated with sin against the "*daimons*."¹⁶ Most important is the climactic scene in *Iliad* 24, when Achilles obeys the direct command to return the body of Hector to Priam. Here is a rare occasion when Homer's Olympians forgo their relative indifference to humans' actions and lives—for their petty Trojan wars, their generations as ephemeral as leaves.¹⁷ But now, the mutilation of the corpse of Hector ("most beloved") displeases and even enrages the gods.¹⁸ Messengers are sent, and Hermes escorts Priam to Achilles's tent, where he "prays" for Hector's release:

Great Priam entered, unseen by the others, and then standing near he seized Achilles' knees with his hands and kissed *his* hands—those terrible man-murdering hands, that killed his many sons. It was like when viscous Delusion [*Ate*] takes hold of a man, who after killing another in his own country arrives at the house of a rich man in some distant land—and wonder [θάμβος] takes hold of those who see him. In this way, Achilles wondered as he gazed on god-like Priam. And the others also wondered, and looked at each other in surmise. And Priam, addressing his prayer to Achilles, said, "Remember your own father, Achilles (so like the gods!)—an old man like I am, at the fearful threshold of old age."¹⁹

In response to Priam's astonishing gesture and words, Achilles relents. He lets go of Hector's body—without ransom. More metaphorically, he lets go of his gathered rage at Hector, Priam, Priam's sons, and all Trojans. That rage is not entirely extinguished, it would seem, for Achilles is at pains to control it still—for fear that he might kill Priam and so "sin against the gods' commands."²⁰ He does not commit this sin, and lets Priam

16. On Achilles, see *Il.* 1.206–21. On Diomedes, see *Il.* 1.814–24 (notice too his lack of fear and trembling [δέος, ὄκνος] in addressing Athena). On breaking oaths, see *Il.* 19.265. On *daimons*, see *Il.* 23.595.

17. See *Il.* 6.145–9, 21.463–6.

18. Achilles's atrocity stirs the gods' pity (*Il.* 24.22–23) and Apollo's anger (24.32–54); the mutilation of Hector's corpse has indeed become a cause of divine wrath (μήνιμα, 22.358).

19. *Il.* 24.477–87.

20. *Il.* 24.560–61 (μή . . . Διὸς δ' ἀλίτωμαι ἐφετμάς); cf. 24.186 (οὔτε γὰρ ἔστ' ἄφρων οὔτ' ἄσκοπος οὔτ' ἀλιτήμιον), 24.586.

go home alive—and without ransom. In this spontaneous letting go, and in the quoted simile, it is as if the histories and identities of the two men converge: Priam stands in for the frail, defenseless father that Achilles left at home; Achilles, doomed to die soon, stands in for the valiant son that Priam has just lost. Each has lost his dearest other. Each sees himself in the other. Enmity is suspended; they share a meal and agree on an armistice. Whatever the future will bring, the past is laid to rest.

The scene is a favorite one, and its multivalence has inspired many readings. In his philosophical study of forgiveness, Charles Griswold claims that the scene explores the “recognition of shared humanity,”²¹ which (Griswold argues) is necessary but insufficient for forgiveness *per se*. It is indeed true that the salient Greek cognates for “forgiveness” (*suggnōmē*) do not yet appear in Homer’s vocabulary. Indeed, the concept itself is fairly alien to his heroic world: Homeric gods and heroes do *not* forgive those who harm them, in word or deed; vengeance is an ethical duty and a divine activity. And yet for all this, the climactic moment of the *Iliad* depicts a scene of—how should one name it?—letting go, release, deliverance, absolution, if not explicit “forgiveness.” It is certainly true that the scene overturns the *Iliad*’s dominant ethos of heroic strength, victory, and jealously guarded reciprocity. The surprise of it all is reflected in the thick language of reverential wonder (θαμβος). Priam and Achilles gaze at each other, as if some strange epiphany were at hand. We *may* be put in mind of the New Testament’s word for forgiving: *aphiēmi*, literally “I send or throw away” (noun form: *aphesis*), as if forgiveness were a casting off of burdens or unwanted matter. Homer uses the verb only for “throwing” missiles, yet there is a clear sense that Achilles has now at last listened to the “prayers” of *this* father figure: *Atē* and wrath are banished, and healing comes.

In her interpretation of the scene, Simone Weil (like Griswold) points to the fact that the war will continue, that anger still simmers within the two men, that the grief is still raw for both. And yet, for Weil, this *one* moment sees Achilles and Priam together transcending the mechanical cycle of vengeance, the sheer habit of brutality, and all that Weil sums up as the

21. Charles L. Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 77.

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tyranny of “force.” Opposed to this pervasive “force”—heavy, impersonal, pitiless—is the other reality of “grace,” as that which suddenly and unexpectedly lifts the weight and restores people to their half-forgotten, more universal selfhood. For Weil, almost paradoxically, suffering “force” is a “precondition” of love, for “he who does not realize to what extent *shifting* fortune and necessity hold in subjection every human spirit, cannot regard as fellow creatures nor love as he loves himself those whom chance separated from him by an abyss.”²² So in Weil’s *Iliad*, the suffering of a war gives way to a near miraculous grace—which allows former enemies not merely to recognize their shared humanity but to love the other as themselves, as almost happens in the mutual wonder of Priam and Achilles. The wonder of it all makes the *Iliad* the greatest poem, and its sorrowful affirmations are revived in Attic tragedy, and ultimately in the Gospel, whose account of the Passion and Resurrection sees “the last marvellous expression of the Greek genius.”²³

Weil’s essay “The *Iliad* or the Poem of Force” (1939) remains inspiring, but one should hesitate (I suggest) to over-emphasize any points of continuity between the *Iliad* and the Gospel, between Achilles’s tragic suffering and Christ’s Passion, or his “forgiveness” of Priam with Christ’s last words on the Cross. A final passage from the *Iliad* sees Achilles trying to comfort Priam with a quintessentially Greek (and profoundly un-Christian) image of the human condition and its divine hinterlands:

Two jars [*πίθοι*] stand on Zeus’s threshold, filled with the gifts that he gives—one of good, the other of evil. To whomsoever thunder-loving Zeus gives a mixture of the two, that person stumbles now on evil, now on good. To whomsoever he gives of misery only, that person he makes a laughingstock: ravening hunger drives him across the divine earth, and he wanders honored neither by gods nor mortals.²⁴

22. Simone Weil, “The *Iliad* or the Poem of Force,” in *An Anthology*, ed. Sian Miles (London: Penguin, 2005), 212.

23. *Ibid.*, 212.

24. *Il.* 24.527–33 (translation mine).

The passage is an early instance of the so-called "Archaic pessimism," that feeling of human helplessness (*ἀμηχανία*) that is so pronounced in the poetry of the seventh and sixth centuries BC: the gods exist, beautiful, powerful, immortal; but their Olympus is distant, their will opaque, their gifts unpredictable; "Zeus's will" is to dispense *both* good and evil, sometimes good, but *always* evil, and so human life is inevitably crossed by sorrow and even disaster; there is little hope of divine redemption, and at worst, the gods actively hate human beings, even for their virtues. This general pessimism has been called a "tragic" view of life, and though Homer does not state directly that "the best of all is not to have been born," the sense of mankind's helplessness is strong enough for him to be called "teacher and leader of the tragic poets."²⁵ One might briefly compare and contrast this *ἀμηχανία* with Judaeo-Christian notions of human fallenness. Homer's Greeks know that they are lower creatures in that they sometimes glimpse an Olympian radiance that is *not* their lot: Homeric man is as ephemeral as leaves,²⁶ and lives for those moments of glory when they are "graced" (as it were) by the gods with godlike *menos* and strength, *charis* and beauty;²⁷ Pindar's humans are "creatures of a day" and "dreams of a shadow" except when visited by some "god-given brilliance";²⁸ characters of tragedy often see themselves as coming to "nothing" through the gods' power; more optimistic are Plato's mortals who inhabit the shadows of becoming—unless enlightened by rays of some eternal Beauty or Goodness.²⁹ Through all these instances of a general type, the difference with the biblical parallel is telling:

25. *Resp.* 595c1–3; cf. 598d8. On Archaic pessimism, see the collection of essays in Douglas Cairns, ed., *Tragedy and Archaic Greek Thought* (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2013), especially Easterling's "Sophocles and the Wisdom of Silenus: A Reading of *Oedipus at Colonus* 1211–48" (193–204), and Lloyd's "Mutability of Fortune in Euripides" (204–06).

26. See *Il.* 2.468, 6.146–149, 21.463–6.

27. See *Il.* 5.1–8 (Athena grants *μένος* to Diomedes), and *Od.* 6.229–337 (Athena sheds *χάρις* over Odysseus), with, e.g., E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 8–10.

28. See *Pythian Odes* 8.95–97.

29. E.g., Sophocles, *Ajax* 125–26 (Ὀρῶ γὰρ ἡμᾶς οὐδὲν ὄντας ἄλλο πλὴν εἶδωλῶν, ὅσοι περ ζῶμεν, ἢ κούφην σκιάν); cf. Herodotus, *Histories* 8.106 (τὸ μηδὲν εἶναι); *Symposium* 211d–212a; *Phaedrus* 249c–d; *Resp.* 515e–517b.

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ly instance of the so-called "Archaic human helplessness (*ἀμηχανία*) that poetry of the seventh and sixth centuries, beautiful, powerful, immortal; but their will opaque, their gifts unpredictable; both good and evil, sometimes good, human life is inevitably crossed by sorrow. There is little hope of divine redemption, they hate human beings, even for their pessimism has been called a "tragic" view does not state directly that "the best of men," the sense of mankind's helplessness might be called "teacher and leader might briefly compare and contrast Christian notions of human fallenness that they are lower creatures in that Olympian radiance that is *not* their gem as leaves,²⁶ and lives for those they are "graced" (as it were) by the mind strength, *charis* and beauty;²⁷ Pindar's "dreams of a day" and "dreams of a shadow" the "god-given brilliance";²⁸ characters themselves as coming to "nothing" through pessimistic are Plato's mortals who inhabit—unless enlightened by rays of some grace.²⁹ Through all these instances of a parallel with the biblical parallel is telling:

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30. *ibid.* (on the gifts of the gods, *μήνη* to Diomedes), and *Od.* 6.229–337 (on the gifts of the gods, *μήνη* to Diomedes), with, e.g., E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 8–10.

31. *ibid.*, 107.

32. *ibid.*, 15–26 (Ὁρῶ γὰρ ἡμᾶς οὐδὲν ὄντας ἄλλο πλὴν εἶδωλ', cf. Herodotus, *Histories* 8.106 (τὸ μὴδὲν εἶναι); *ibid.*, 249c–d; *Resp.* 515e–517b).

the divine may inform the temporal and temporarily uplift the warrior, athlete, or philosopher, but it does not do so out of or through love:

As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower in the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children.³⁰

Sin—both in terms of mankind's distance from the gods and of the gods' greater attention to human behavior—may well come more to the fore in the great post-*Iliadic* epic poems. If so, one must disentangle the theme from the language of divine justice in which it is couched. Reflecting the ostensible language of their sources, many studies of the *Odyssey* and of Hesiod's poems hardly treat "sin" or even "evil" as a central concept, and it is certainly true that *hamartia* as sinful "error" or "wrong-doing" vis-à-vis the gods is not an important word in these poems. Nevertheless, there are approximations: *hubris*, *atasthalia* ("folly"), and even *adikia* ("injustice") itself can be said of those who offend the gods by their properly *ethical* behavior, that is, in their relations to other humans (as opposed to the gods).³¹ Thus, in the *Odyssey*, as the "much-enduring" hero wanders about the Mediterranean and alights on unknown islands, he often asks whether he has come to a place inhabited by "hybristic, wild and unjust people, or by those who welcome strangers and have a god-fearing mind."³² Among the former are the Cyclopes and the Suitors, who do not fear Zeus or the duty of hospitality sanctioned by him, and who hubristically ignore the "law" (at once religious

30. Ps 103: 15–17, ESV. John Taylor's discussion in *Classics and the Bible: Hospitality and Recognition* ([London: Duckworth, 2007], 23) overlooks the key difference—the divine covenant and "steadfast love" basically absent in the Homeric (and Classical) passages.

31. See, e.g., Zeus's lament over the *atasthaliai* of mortals, exemplified in Aegisthus's deeds—seducing Clytemnestra, killing Agamemnon, and ignoring the gods' prohibitions thereto (*Od.* 1.32–43). In Aegisthus's case, the "wages of sin are death," to paraphrase 1.37–43 with Romans 6:23. Cf. Euryalus, who to Odysseus seems *atasthalos* and unfavored by the gods (*Od.* 8.166–70).

32. *Od.* 6.119–21, 8.572–76, 9.173–76, 13.200–202.

and ethical) that “travellers and beggars are sacred to Zeus.”³³ So the Cyclops Polyphemus and the Suitors earn the wages of sin, as it were, and rightfully pay for their transgressions.³⁴ So too (at a strictly religious level) do Odysseus’s men, when in their “folly” they disobey the divine command and eat the cattle sacred to Helios; only Odysseus abstains and is saved.³⁵ More generally, then, the just and god-fearing king is rewarded with material wealth and honors:³⁶ this is, indeed, the happy ending enjoyed by Odysseus and Penelope.

In such a dispensation, well might one claim that the gods, including Zeus himself, wander the earth, observing and punishing those who “err” or “sin.”³⁷ Well too might one tell of a place in the underworld reserved for divine punishment: here is Minos, son of Zeus, overseeing justice done to Tityus,

33. *Od.* 6.208, 14.58. The sacred law of hospitality is reiterated emphatically in a remarkable passage of Plato’s *Laws* (729c8–730a9), which divides human excellence into two spheres: “obedient service to the laws of one’s country” (ὕπηρεια τῶν οἰκοι νόμων), and avoidance of “wrongs to strangers” (εἰς τοὺς ξένους ἀμαρτήματα). Toward the latter (vulnerable foreigners), the best, most Zeus-like person will act like a “genius and god” (δαίμων καὶ θεὸς τῷ ξενίῳ), while the “greatest” (ἀμαρτημῶ), that against the suppliant, will be punished by god, the “guardian of the sufferer” (φύλαξ τοῦ παθόντος). Here *hamartia* cognates are at once legal and moral “errors” and “sins,” for Magnesia’s domestic laws are also divinely grounded.

34. In *Od.* 22.411–17, Odysseus claims that the Suitors were punished by the gods’ fate and their own criminal deeds, a statement perhaps consistent with Zeus’s “programmatically” utterance that humans by their own folly (*atasthaliai*) bring evil and suffering on themselves—“beyond what is fated,” i.e., in addition to divine punishment (1.32–34).

35. *Od.* 1.7–9, 12.300.

36. *Od.* 19.106–114: the righteous king is sound both *religiously* (θεουδής) and *ethically* (εὐδικίας ἀνέχῃσι) in properly human interactions. The sentiment and language of Hesiod in *Opera et Dies* 225–37 is similar. Both are echoed by Plato’s Adeimantus in *Resp.* 363a7–c2.

37. *Od.* 13.213–214 (Ζεὺς σφραγίσσεται ἰκετήσιος, ὃς τε καὶ ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους ἐφορᾷ καὶ τείνεται, ὃς τις ἀμάρτη); cf. *Od.* 17.485–86. The motif underlies Ovid’s tale of Philemon and Baucis, visited by Zeus and Hermes (*Metamorphoses* 8.611–724), and enters history when Paul and Barnabas were mistaken by the Lystrans for Zeus and Hermes (Acts 14:8–18). See Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Acts: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2005), 124. Such events may inform such passages as Mt 25:40 (ESV): “And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’” Cf. Lk 10:16; Taylor, *Classics and the Bible*, 1–8.

Tantalus, Sisyphus, the gods. “Such those rebellious.” by Odysseus) is for his “godlike” of his labors in li crimes committed a heightened awar the properly humi hint of divine *forgi* will. And where t favorites follow: i Odysseus kills all and maidservants, according to the G enemies.” To forg harm, would be a virtue to be cultiva

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38. *Od.* 11.568–600. almost directly applied to siod (e.g., *Theogony* 509–2 as well as in Virgil’s *Aene*

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Odysseus claims that the Suitors were punished by their own criminal deeds, a statement perhaps consistent with the Greek sense of justice that humans by their own folly (*atastasia*) bring themselves—"beyond what is fated," i.e., in *Works and Days* 32–34).

The king is sound both religiously (θεουδής) and in his properly human interactions. The sentiment expressed in *Works and Days* 225–37 is similar. Both are echoed by *Works and Days* 17–c2.

ὅς τις τείσεται ἰκετήσιος, ὅς τε καὶ ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους
cf. *Od.* 17.485–86. The motif underlies *Odyssey* 17.485–86, when Paul and Barnabas were mistaken by the crowd (Acts 14:8–18). See Charles H. Talbert, *Reading the Acts of the Apostles* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), 124. Such events may inform such passages as *Acts* 17:23–34, where Paul will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you know, my brothers, you did it to me." Cf. Lk 10:16: 3.

Tantalus, Sisyphus, forever punished for assaulting or deceiving the gods. "Such place divine eternal justice had prepared for those rebellious."³⁸ Near the place of punishment (as narrated by Odysseus) is Heracles: he was rewarded with apotheosis for his "godlike" virtues and endurance, yet one is reminded of his labors in life—those divinely appointed punishments for crimes committed in a fit of madness. Through all this, there is a heightened awareness of divine justice for transgressions within the properly human realm. At the same time, there is hardly a hint of divine *forgiveness* for what amount to *sins* against the gods' will. And where the gods lead, heroes, kings, and other divine favorites follow: in the *Odyssey*'s climactic scene of vengeance, Odysseus kills all the Suitors and refuses to spare suppliants and maidservants, for they were traitors too. So is justice done, according to the Greek proverbial wisdom: "Help friends, harm enemies." To forgive, and *not* to harm those who cause them harm, would be an injustice scarcely conceivable—let alone a virtue to be cultivated.

The fate of the Suitors and "happy" ending of the *Odyssey*, with Odysseus aided by Athena, and ultimately by Zeus, would promulgate a certain moral optimism about the power of good, as Homerically conceived. Zeus's justice is also Hesiod's great theme, explored somewhat more abstractly through his cosmological *Theogony* and his agricultural "almanac," *Works and Days*. Both poems brood on the reality and origins of evil, both cosmic and moral. An original crime stands as the cause of evil for human beings: the theft of Prometheus. *Works and Days* tells the story from a more anthropocentric perspective. Evil is clearly a reality in Hesiod's human world: one *eris* may bring healthy competition, but the other brings wars and conflict, not least between Hesiod himself and his brother, Perses, who criminally conspires with the "gift-devouring" nobles. Why do the wicked prosper? The poem argues Hesiod's hopeful response that in the end they do not. Zeus has so ordered the cosmos that work is both necessary and right: Perses's ilk will eventually

38. *Od.* 11.568–600. Milton's lines (*Paradise Lost*, bk. 1, line 70) could be almost directly applied to Homer's "hell," which would find successors in Hesiod (e.g., *Theogony* 509–25), Plato's eschatological myths (*Phaedo*, *Grg.*, *Resp.*), as well as in Virgil's *Aeneid* 6 and Dante's *Inferno*.

suffer for their laziness and expropriations, while Hesiod's seasonal labors as well as his poetic "almanac" are hallowed by the order of things. Much of *Works and Days* is given over to practical moral wisdom by which to accommodate oneself to that order: cooperate with neighbors; reciprocate; be frugal; smile but have a witness; get a house, woman, and ox; do each work in its season. The great aggregate of precepts, both pragmatic and moral, reach back up ultimately to Zeus's will and "justice." Most succinctly, that one should work for wealth, rather than take it by violence, is "the law Zeus established over mankind."³⁹ Therefore, wrongs against fellow humans are not merely crimes, but sins against the divine order. Hence Hesiod will use a strong term like *alitaínein* in places: Zeus visits collective punishment on whole cities because of one bad man who "sins"; Zeus is angry at those who in their "folly" commit "sin" against orphans, as well as those who steal, harm suppliants and strangers, cuckold their brothers, or abuse elderly parents with harsh words.⁴⁰ The commands and prohibitions come in scattered bundles. Although Hesiod (like shepherd Moses)⁴¹ had been to the mountaintop, he received there no sharply ordered Decalogue—though the gift of song and poetic inspiration may be a partial substitution. Certainly, his ethico-religious insight fortifies him for any strife with Perses and the formidable nobles: Hesiod stands on the side of cosmic justice, and should by rights not suffer the fate of Abel.

It was on "holy Helicon" (Hesiod reports) that the Muses granted him a "divine voice" with the knowledge to sing true words about the past, the future, and the blessed gods who "always are."⁴² Part of the revelation they permit is a deeper

39. On Zeus's "law" (νόμος), see *Op.* 274–76.

40. On the collective punishment of a city, see *Op.* 240–41. One thinks of Sodom and Gomorrah ("whose ἀμαρτίαι were great"), yet Yahweh is "reasoned down" by Abraham to spare Sodom if there are but ten righteous (δίκαιοι) people in it (Gn 18:20–33), while Hesiod's Zeus *will* punish all for the sin of *one*. Regarding sins against orphans, see *Op.* 330 (ὅς τέ τευ ἀφραδῆς ἀλταίνητ' ὄρφανὰ τέκνα). Regarding other various wrongs, see *Op.* 320–41.

41. Modern commentators commonly juxtapose Hesiod and his near contemporary, Amos. The conceptually more interesting parallel with Moses as a fellow cosmologist and lawgiver appears in Philo's *On the Eternity of the World* 17–19, for example.

42. *Theogony* 22–34.

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and expropriations, while Hesiod's his poetic "almanac" are hallowed by n of *Works and Days* is given over to which to accommodate oneself to that neighbors; reciprocate; be frugal; smile house, woman, and ox; do each work aggregate of precepts, both pragmatic ultimately to Zeus's will and "justice." should work for wealth, rather than law Zeus established over mankind."³⁹ fellow humans are not merely crimes, order. Hence Hesiod will use a strong es: Zeus visits collective punishment on ne bad man who "sins"; Zeus is angry bly" commit "sin" against orphans, as harm suppliants and strangers, cuckold lderly parents with harsh words.⁴⁰ The ns come in scattered bundles. Although oses)⁴¹ had been to the mountaintop, arply ordered Decalogue—though the spiration may be a partial substitution. gious insight fortifies him for any strife idable nobles: Hesiod stands on the side uld by rights not suffer the fate of Abel. y Helicon" (Hesiod reports) that the vine voice" with the knowledge to sing t, the future, and the blessed gods who he revelation they permit is a deeper

g), see *Op.* 274–76.

ishment of a city, see *Op.* 240–41. One thinks "whose ἀμαρτίαι were great"), yet Yahweh is n to spare Sodom if there are but ten righteous (20–33), while Hesiod's Zeus will punish all for against orphans, see *Op.* 330 (ὅς τέ τιν ἀφραδίης arding other various wrongs, see *Op.* 320–41.

s commonly juxtapose Hesiod and his near- ptually more interesting parallel with Moses as a ver appears in Philo's *On the Eternity of the World*

insight into the nature of evil. For while Hesiod's labors are ultimately hallowed by Zeus's will, nevertheless the "blessing" of productive labor is a mixed one, since the need for work arose from a more primal sin: Prometheus's theft of fire. The centrally important story of Prometheus earns versions in both poems. *Works and Days* alludes to it briefly and concentrates on its human consequences: prior to the theft, a day's work would "easily" produce a year's food, but in jealous anger at Prometheus's "hiding" of fire, Zeus himself "hid mankind's livelihood," thus punishing mankind in perpetuity for that primeval rebellion.⁴³ To compound the punishment (and perhaps to make the work even harder), Zeus gifted mankind a "beautiful evil" in which men can take a foolish delight. Pandora, adorned by the gods with "all the gifts" (*pan-dora*) of wifely industry, erotic grace (*charis*), desire, and mercurial treachery,⁴⁴ comes to mankind like a beautiful bride, but the veritable dowry that she brings proves to be a third and final punishment. Pandora's box—or rather her "jar," *pithos*—like Zeus's two jars in Achilles's speech—proves a dubious wedding gift, as out of it fly endless evils:

Before this, the tribes of mankind lived on the earth without evils, without hard labor and cruel diseases. . . . Now myriad sorrows [λύπῃ] wander among mankind. The earth is full of evils [κακῶν], the sea too is full. Diseases wander freely among mankind by day and night, bringing evil to mortals—in silence, for Zeus in his cunning has taken their voices. Thus it is impossible to escape the mind of Zeus.⁴⁵

And does Zeus in his ineluctable cunning devise yet another, fourth punishment for hapless mortals? Hope alone remains in the *pithos*, a detail that has been variously construed, but a very likely interpretation is that Hope is in fact a merely apparent good, a "beautiful evil" like Pandora herself, if what Hope personifies is deceptive expectation. In Archaic literature down perhaps to

43. See *Op.* 42–50 with the emphatic repetition of forms of *kruptein* (42, 47, 50).

44. *Op.* 59–82.

45. *Op.* 90–105 (translation mine).

Thucydides, Hope can be that which leads people into temptation and consequent ruin.⁴⁶

All this is due to the “mind of Zeus,” but I have pointed more systematically to the *series* of punishments that Hesiod’s Zeus inflicts. It is therefore superficial merely to compare Prometheus’s theft to that of Adam and Eve (both resulting in man needing to “eat in the sweat of his brow”), or merely to call Pandora “the Greek Eve.”⁴⁷ This may be partly true, but Zeus’s vengeance seems more thorough and cruel than Yahweh’s: he “delights” in deceiving Prometheus and requiting the “gift” of fire with compensatory counter “gifts” of his own—indeed gifts hidden within gifts, if Pandora comes bearing the box, which itself conceals Hope, the last of a series of trick presents. If so, who could escape the labyrinthine jealousy of Zeus’s mind? Hesiod contrasts this Pandoran present with a paradisiacal predecessor from the time when man did not know labor, disease, or other evils. One naturally links this with the passage that shortly follows the Golden Age when people lived “like gods,” without sorrow or old age, feasting until subdued by sleep and eventually “hidden” completely by Zeus.⁴⁸ The earth bears them crops, but the happiness of this golden people “under Kronos” seems defined more by its lack of evils than by any positive good.⁴⁹ They do not walk in the Garden like Adam and Eve did, hearing God call out to them. If so, Zeus’s justice lacks Yahweh’s more kindly

46. On Hope the tempter, deceiver, see, e.g., Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 811; Sophocles, *Antigone* 615–19; Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War* 5.102–103; the proverb “in hope we hunger” (Antiphon, frag. 123.7; Menander, *Mon.* 42); Cairns, *Tragedy and Archaic Greek Thought*, xii; and, above all, F. M. Cornford, *Thucydides Mythistoricus* (London: Edward Arnold, 1907), 224–26 (and elsewhere). W. J. Verdenius interprets Hesiod’s Hope as an evil (*A Commentary on Hesiod: Work and Days*, vv. 1–382 [Boston: Brill, 1985], 66–71), while Bremmer lists other interpretative possibilities (Jan N. Bremmer, *Greek Religion and Culture, the Bible and the Ancient Near East* [Boston: Brill, 2008], 28–29). The image of Pandora’s box has transcended its Greek origins altogether as a universal symbol of evil: see Dora Panofsky and Erwin Panofsky, *Pandora’s Box: The Changing Aspects of a Mythical Symbol* (1956; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

47. On the comparison, see Bremmer’s *Greek Religion and Culture*, 19–34.

48. *Op.* 109–126.

49. See esp. *Op.* 112–15 (ἀκηδέα θυμὸν ἔχοντες / νόσφιν ἄτερ τε πόνων καὶ οἰζύος, οὐδέ τι δειλὸν / γῆρας ἔπην . . . κακῶν ἔκτοσθεν πάντων).

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dimension, even before the “fall” precipitated by Prometheus and the serpent.

The *Theogony* tears aside the veil of the narrow present to reveal the terrifying origins and deeper nature of the divine cosmos. Not created in an orderly succession of days or pronounced “very good” by the Lord, but rather evolving through cosmic couplings, rapes, castrations, wars, and deceptions—Hesiod’s cosmos eventually settles into the more “just” and intelligible reign of Zeus, who takes Intelligence (*Metis*), Law (*Themis*), and, we could say, *Eurynome* (“Wide-ruling one”) as wives and allegorical helpers, producing such offspring as the Seasons (*Horae*), Good Order (*Eunomia*), Justice (*Dike*), Peace (*Eirene*), the Graces, and other brightening deities. Yet even despite Zeus’s beneficent mingling of force and persuasion (to phrase it in Plato’s terminology in the *Timaeus*), Hesiod’s cosmos remains darkened by inextinguishable evils. The terrible offspring of Night clearly still wander the earth: hateful Destiny and dark Fate, Death, Blame, Woe, punishing Fates, Nemesis, Deception, cruel Old Age, hard-hearted Strife, painful Toil, Forgetfulness, Famine, Pains, Battles, Wars, Murders, Manslaughters, Quarrels, Lies, Controversies, Lawlessness, Delusion—a list that also includes Sleep, Dreams, Love, and the Oath, perhaps because these too are blessings as dubious as Hope. Broken oaths, for example, do the “greatest damage.”⁵⁰ These children of Night are ultimately descendents of Chaos—a “family” of elements that resists the improving powers of Zeus, similar perhaps to the way “the receptacle” resists Plato’s Demiurge.⁵¹ In such a cos-

50. *Theogony* 211–32.

51. David Sedley broaches this comparison in interesting ways, though he is too schematic (I venture) in positing a two-stage “aetiology of evil” in Hesiod and Plato’s *Timaeus* (“Hesiod’s *Theogony* and Plato’s *Timaeus*,” in *Plato and Hesiod*, eds. G. R. Boys-Stones and J. H. Haubold [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010], 246–58). For Hesiod, Death, Old Age, and all Night’s offspring are clearly active and “actual” (in human life and beyond), and do *not* mark simply a “potentiality” for evil that will be “actualized” by the creation of Pandora. Strauss Clay more accurately describes Night’s brood as “eternal destructive forces, personifications whose influence on the cosmos must henceforth be reckoned with” (Jenny Strauss Clay, *Hesiod’s Cosmos* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003], 19). Nor, concerning Plato’s cosmological scheme and beneficent Demiurge, can one blithely assert that “when evil is

mos, pervaded by this legion of daemonic forces, well might hapless mankind have need of its guardian angels. Hesiod provides them: the ghosts of Golden Age people remain on earth as "holy daimons . . . warding off evil, guardians of mortal mankind."⁵² One might struggle to map this catalog of woe onto Leibniz's trifold distinction of evil into the moral, physical, and metaphysical. Early gods such as Mother Earth and Ouranos, or the allegorical offspring of Night, are at once natural (physical) and divine (metaphysical). And although Zeus seems more civilized and moral than Kronos, all the divine powers from lowly Sleep to Zeus on high are enmeshed in the same single web: the *theogonia*, the gods' genealogy, or better, the birth-chain of the divine as a whole.

Curiously, recent commentators do not (to my knowledge) name Hesiod a pantheist, although he is one. And like pantheists generally, he struggles to name an absolute distinction between good and evil (cf. Gn 2:9). So even the stories of Prometheus, Pandora, and the box, while at one level name the origin of evil for mankind, at another level they also hint at Prometheus's philanthropy, to be contrasted with Zeus's cruelty. This is certainly how Aeschylus read Hesiod and extended his myth: Aeschylus's play problematizes the seeming evil of Zeus, a "tyrant" who punishes Prometheus for his "love of mankind" (*philanthrōpia*). The characterization is so dramatically effective that some readers spontaneously identify with Prometheus as the rebel against all tyrants, secular or ecclesiastical. Some, like P. B. Shelley, even identify Aeschylus's Zeus with Yahweh or the Christian God, forgetting that neither of the latter is *defined* by the jealousy vis-à-vis humanity that is so integral to the Zeus of early Greece.

realized, it descends from a divine cause, rather than representing the divine cause's failure" (Sedley, "Hesiod's *Theogony* and Plato's *Timaeus*," 258). For is it true that the creation of woman (*Timaeus* 42d3-4) first introduces evil into the created cosmos, when in fact the Demiurge is at such pains to "persuade" (and not "force") the imperfect, recalcitrant triangles, and to make such mortal flaws as, for example, death, old age, and disease as good as possible (81e-82a)?

52. *Op.* 122-23. In *Op.* 248-55, the "immortal guardians" who watch over kings' justice and piety are "nearby" and legion—30,000 strong.

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3. TRAGIC GREECE

In a tragedy like Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*, one encounters a religious attitude that (taking a page from A. N. Whitehead) conceives God or the gods as the "enemy."⁵³ Far from pitying human frailty or forgiving human sins, the deity now can actively seek to diminish little humans even further by tempting, deluding, and cutting them down. This notion is present in Homer, perhaps even stronger in Hesiod, and positively programmatic in later Archaic and tragic literature. Here the issue is couched in terms of divine *jealousy* (*phthonos*).⁵⁴ The gods are jealous of their rank and power; they grow angry not only at slights and sacrifices omitted, but also at human greatness and even virtue, which they punish. Here is a theology inimical to New Testament writers, yet it is almost a commonplace for Theognis, Solon, Aeschylus, and others. One programmatic passage from Herodotus's *Histories* captures the idea:

You see how the god smites with his thunderbolt creatures of greatness and does not suffer them to display their pride, while little ones do not move him to anger; and you see how it is always on the tallest buildings and trees that his bolts fall; for the god loves to bring low all things of surpassing greatness. Thus a large army is destroyed by a smaller, when the jealous [*φθονήσας*] god sends panic or the thunderbolt among them, and they perish unworthily; for the god suffers pride in none but himself.⁵⁵

The principle is borne out most programmatically for Herodotus in the story of Croesus. To him, Solon communicates his

53. Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), 16-17.

54. Another central pattern (in, e.g., Theognis, Solon, Pindar, Aeschylus) is that of *olbia-koros-hubris-nemesis*: wealth or happiness bring excess and *hubris*, calling down divine punishment. See, e.g., William Chase Greene's thoughtful "Fate, Good, and Evil, in Early Greek Poetry," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 46 (1935): 1-36; Bremmer, *Hamartia*, 112-23; N. R. E. Fisher, *Hybris* (Liverpool: Aris & Phillips, 1992); and Helm's conclusion that, for poets like Theognis, "from *koros* and *hubris* comes every evil"—"capital vices," as it were (J. H. Helm, "'Koros': From Satisfaction to Greed," *Classical World* 87, no. 1 [1993]: 5-11, at 11).

55. 7.10 (trans. A. D. Godley).

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"Archaic wisdom": "O Croesus, knowing that all divinity is jealous and disposed to cause disturbance, I am questioned by you about human affairs. . . . To very many people the god has given a glimpse of happiness, only to uproot them utterly."⁵⁶ This is indeed what happens in the tragic story of Croesus himself: raised up to unprecedented prosperity, Croesus grows overly great, "misses" the meaning of the oracle, and tempted by deluded "hope" crosses the Halys, undoing his kingdom.⁵⁷ The drama is laced with the language of tragedy: the *hubris* of power, the *hamartia*, the reversal of fortunes (*peripeteia*), Croesus's pitiable end as Cyrus's "slave," and most of all the quiet workings of fate, for it was fated that Croesus would fall, and when he does, it is through his own unwitting, yet voluntary, fated actions. This paradoxical pattern—the tragic hero or victim actively achieving his fate, even when seeking to avoid it—is evident in the stories of Herodotus's Polycrates and Xerxes, and most of all in Sophocles's Oedipus. Such stories embellish paradigmatic truths: the divine is jealous, and often cunningly malign, if it does indeed lure individuals to their doom, tempting them with trifles, using even their strengths and virtues to effect their ruin. To such deities, one cannot even pray "lead us not into temptation." What one has instead is the divine counsel of moderation, or rather a warning to avoid excess: "nothing overmuch," the commandment written (it is said) in golden letters on a wall of Apollo's temple in Delphi.

The notion of a tragic victim like Croesus, Oedipus, or Agamemnon being *led* willingly to his doom leads us on to various explorations of its possible origins—and historical legacy. Early anthropological, "myth-ritual" theorists suggested that heroes of the great Attic tragedies (and figures like Herodotus's Croesus) bear some resemblance to, and originate partly in, the religion of sacrifice, and more specifically in scapegoating rituals. The typical sacrifice involved cajoling the animal victim to nod its head, as if assenting to its own doom—a voluntary gift to the god. Is this dynamic to be detected in Aeschylus's

56. Herodotus, *Histories* 1.32–33 (τὸ θεῖον πᾶν ἐὼν φθονερόν τε καὶ παραχῶδες . . . πολλοῖσι γὰρ διὴ ὑποδέξας ὄλβον ὁ θεὸς προρρίζους ἀνέτρεψε) (translation mine). See, e.g., Susan O. Shapiro, "Herodotus and Solon," *Classical Antiquity* 15, no. 2 (1996): 348–64.

57. *Histories* 1.71 (ἁμαρτῶν τοῦ χρησιμοῦ . . . ἐλπίσας).

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Agamemnon, Sophocles's Oedipus and Antigone, Euripides's Pentheus, and by extension even such quasi-"tragic" figures as Plato's Socrates, as they stumble toward a doom that they have ostensibly embraced?⁵⁸ That the victim goes voluntarily is also important in the common rituals of scapegoating. There is evidence that in cities across the Greek Mediterranean—in Colophon, Abdera, Athens, Chaeronea, Massilia (Marseilles), and elsewhere—a marginal person (e.g., a criminal, slave, foreigner, or deformed/ugly individual) was ritually paraded out of the city, led to the borders, driven abroad, and in some cases even possibly killed. The expulsion of this *pharmakos* or *perikatharma* was felt by the citizens as bringing salvation, purification, and release (*katharsis*), in the belief that scapegoats carried with them all the sins, pollution, and evils of the city. Such a ritual "expulsion of evil" may have mythic parallels in royal personages voluntarily sacrificing themselves to save their people, especially if kings and princesses are also marginal figures, on their lonely heights. Are such rituals (and their possible mythic forebears) somehow sublimated in the great spectacles of the tragic stage, when a king's exile or death brings *katharsis* to the land or royal house, as with Sophocles's Oedipus or Euripides's Hippolytus? And do they have a further, attenuated echo in Aristotle's theory of tragic *hamartia* and *katharsis*?

Further speculative associations note that in later centuries Euripides's plays proved especially popular across the Hellenized world. One may ask whether such plays as his *Phoenissae* (in which Menoeceus sacrifices himself for the city) or *Alcestis* (where Alcestis might be characterized as a voluntary *pharmakos*) influenced the earliest Greek-speaking Christian communities as they reflected on the nature of Jesus' sacrifice.⁵⁹ Does one hear

58. Such ideas are associated mainly with the "Cambridge Ritualists," influenced by James Frazer's *Scapegoat and Golden Bough*. On tragedy, see, e.g., Gilbert Murray, "Excursus on the Ritual Forms Preserved in Greek Tragedy," in Jane Ellen Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), 341–63. Robert P. Parker's great study of the complex ramifications of *miasma* gives some attention to tragedy: *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 308–21.

59. Bremmer's cross-cultural study of scapegoat rituals concludes: "All we can say is that the tragedies of Euripides are very likely to have contributed to the interpretation of Jesus' death [i.e., a *pharmakos*-type form of atonement]."

echoes of old Greek rituals and tragedies in the Greek words describing Christ as the Paschal sacrifice: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin [*hamartia*] of the world [*kosmos*]!"⁶⁰ The scholarship is impressive; its web of associations and surmises across cities, genres, and centuries, may or may not be strong enough to support any deep historical influence between Greek magico-religious scapegoating and early thinking about Jesus' death. Certainly, reflection on the witnessed miracles of healing emphatically distinguish these as miraculous "remissions of *hamartiai*"—and *not* magic.⁶¹ Furthermore, from the perspective of faith, a positive scholarly link between the Greek *pharmakos* and Jesus' atonement would place Christ even more firmly within one historical nexus, and so affirm his totally *human* nature. At the same time, if Christ as *pharmakos* fulfills the expectations of the old Greek world, it is with astonishing paradox. Here it is no mere king or criminal who volunteers, but God himself, identified as both simultaneously. Here are multiple stumbling blocks for Greeks of all religious stripes, Homeric and Platonic alike, for whom the gods are simply "the immortals" and do not die.

To return to the tragic associations of the term *hamartia*, one stands on firmer ground (*mirabile dictu*) when examining Aristotle's controversial statements about tragedy. His general notion of a "tragic flaw" has passed into common use. Most popular is the claim that tragic heroes evince the flaw of *hubris* or pride, and so invite a quasi-divine *nemesis* that undoes them. Aristotle's own statements do not quite match this "Archaic" pattern. In trying to articulate what kind of hero will elicit the properly tragic feelings of pity and fear, Aristotle proceeds by way of elimination:

The available evidence does not allow us to go any further" (*Greek Religion and Culture*, 214). Underlying this modest verdict is the understanding that "the early Christians . . . were often no less Greek than many an inhabitant of Asia Minor or Egypt, *pace* the prejudices of great classicists as Mommsen and Wilamowitz" (*ibid.*, 232).

60. Jn 1:29, ESV ("Ἴδε ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου). Deeply Greek (e.g., with its reference to the theatre, a specifically Greek cultural institution), yet at the same time startlingly paradoxical, are St. Paul's words about apostleship in 1 Cor 4:9–13 (θεατρον ἐγενήθημεν τῷ κόσμῳ . . . ὡς περικαθάρματα τοῦ κόσμου ἐγενήθημεν).

61. On such passages featuring ἄφεσις ἁμαρτιῶν as Lk 3:3 (John's baptisms), Lk 5:18–26 (healing), and Acts 2:38 (Pentecost), see Talbert, *Reading Acts*, 37–38, 42, 69–73, 170.

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ot allow us to go any further" (*Greek Religion*)
 his modest verdict is the understanding that
 often no less Greek than many an inhabitant of
 prejudices of great classicists as Mommsen and

ος τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου).
 erence to the theatre, a specifically Greek cul-
 me time startlingly paradoxical, are St. Paul's
 or 4:9–13 (θεάτρον ἐγενήθημεν τῷ κόσμῳ ... ὡς
 ημεν).

ng ἄφεσις ἁμαρτιῶν as Lk 3:3 (John's baptisms),
 s 2:38 (Pentecost), see Talbert, *Reading Acts*,

the downfall of a good person inspires disgust, not pity or fear;
 that of a bad person evokes fellow feeling (*to philanthrōpon*)—or
 (a Greek might well add) the satisfaction of seeing justice done.
 What is left is that the protagonist must hover somewhere "in the
 middle," between virtue and vice: in Aristotle's verdict, he or she
 must be basically good, yet have a *hamartia* that causes the tragic
 reversal of fortune (*peripeteia*) from happiness to misery.

There remains, then, the intermediate kind of personage [ὁ
 μεταξύ], a man not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose
 misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and
 depravity [διὰ κακίαν καὶ μοχθηρίαν] but by some error of
 judgment [δι' ἁμαρτίαν τινά], of the number of those in the
 enjoyment of great reputation and prosperity; e.g. Oedipus,
 Thyestes, and the men of note of similar families.⁶²

Every phrase of passages like this has been parsed and fought
 over, perhaps none more than the term *hamartia*. Bywater's trans-
 lation reflects one school of thought: *hamartia* is a particular "mis-
 take" or error, as in an "error of judgment," or some singular act
 whose broad-reaching consequences are not foreseen. This seems
 reasonable, given the implication that "vice and depravity" are
 more deplorable, ethically speaking, than *hamartia*. If so, then the
 "error" of Prometheus in Aeschylus's play might be named as his
 theft of fire; Thyestes's as his banquet; Oedipus's his patri-
 cide and incest; Croesus's his mistaking the oracle, and so forth.⁶³ Perhaps
 still more prevalent, however, is the interpretation of Aristotelian
hamartia as a more deeply ingrained vice that mars an otherwise
 "noble" character. This is the "tragic flaw" once so popular, espe-
 cially in Shakespearean criticism à la A. C. Bradley: Othello's
 jealousy, Hamlet's indecision, Macbeth's ambition, and Lear's
 pride are tragic moral failings—along with (say) Prometheus's
 stubbornness, Agamemnon's self-assertion, Oedipus's curiosity

62. Aristotle, *Poetics* 1453a7–12 (trans. Ingram Bywater).

63. This is Bremmer's conclusion: Aristotelian *hamartia* is "tragic error,"
 i.e., a wrong action committed in ignorance of its nature, effect, etc., which
 is the starting point of a causally connected train of events ending in disaster"
 (*Hamartia*, 63). A recent variation on this approach is offered by Kim, who
 argues that *hamartia* is "ignorance of particulars as per EN 3.1" (Ho Kim,
 "Aristotle's *Hamartia* Reconsidered," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 105
 [2010]: 33–52, at 51).

or ignorance, Antigone's obduracy, Hippolytus's chastity, Medea's jealousy, and Pentheus's disbelief.

4. PHILOSOPHICAL GREECE

A third line of interpretation would establish links between Aristotle's aesthetics and a larger ethical framework. Often admired for "scientifically" treating poetry and art as independent activities, with "rules" of their own, Aristotle in fact also draws upon an extensive background of virtue theory. Whether tragic protagonists are "good," "evil," or intermediate; whether they are "better" or "worse" than the spectators; whether the fall from happiness to misery can be pleasing or not—in asking such questions of tragic art, Aristotle's thinking is pervaded by moral categories. Here the tragic *hamartia* may resonate with Aristotle's doctrine of virtue as a mean or middle between two opposite extremes or vices. The virtue of courage, for instance, lies "between" the vices of cowardice and recklessness; these vices involve an excess and deficiency of fear, respectively, while "courageous" describes actions with the amount of fear that is "right" for a particular situation. Throughout Aristotle's framework, a spatial metaphor is operative: a virtue, with its attendant vices, is placed along a continuum or line, which extends from utter privation (e.g., of fear: recklessness) to utter saturation (e.g., of fear: cowardice), with the virtue to be found *somewhere* in the middle, that "between" being determined by deliberation and practical wisdom. More particularly, the spatial metaphor lends itself to the related metaphor of "hitting" or "missing" the right spot, the morally "correct" middle.⁶⁴ And indeed, Aristotle does use *hamartia* in its almost literal sense to designate vice: cowardice is "missing" the mean.⁶⁵ Bad deliberation, like-

64. On virtue as the mean that "hits" the middle," see, esp., *Eth. Nic.* 1106b14–28 (μεσότης τις ἄρα ἐστὶν ἡ ἀρετή, στοχαστική γε οὐσα τοῦ μέσου), immediately preceding the formal definition of virtue (*Eth. Nic.* 1106b36–1107a8). Bremmer also illustrates "Aristotle's etymologizing" by *Ethica Eudemia* 1222a40 (54n90).

65. *Eth. Nic.* 1115b15–20: "Of the faults that are committed [τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν] one consists in fearing what one should not, another in fearing as we should not, another in fearing when we should not, and so on; and so too with respect to the things that inspire confidence" (trans. W. D. Ross).

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PHILOSOPHICAL GREECE

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wise, is defined as "missing" the mark, as distinct from the *orthotēs* of good deliberation.⁶⁶ Being virtuous is difficult, not so much because of any demonic forces, perversion of the will, or confusing temptations, but because cognitively it is difficult to see, know, and "hit" the mean, while "missing" is easy. There is, therefore, only one form of virtue, while the forms of vice are myriad, and often nameless.⁶⁷

Aristotle's ethical treatment of *hamartia* seems to have led us onto anthropocentric terrain, and indeed it is perhaps strange that both Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* fairly neglect the role of the divine in tragedy and life, respectively. In the former, the protagonist's *hamartia* (however interpreted) is certainly *not* to be construed as a "mistake" or character "flaw" that displeases the gods or contravenes their law; Aristotelian *hamartia* can hardly be translated as "sin."⁶⁸ So too in his ethics: a vice (or its occasional synonym, *hamartia*) is not a "sin" any more than the various virtues are forms of piety. Again, the practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) that informs and becomes habitual through good deliberation is one whose associations are not obviously religious: *phronēsis* is, of course, the highest practical virtue, to be juxtaposed with (and perhaps subordinated to) theoretical virtues such as knowledge (*epistēmē*), insight (*nous*), and wisdom (*sophia*). In these latter, one might more properly find, or enter into, the Aristotelian god—that self-thinking thought (*noēsis noēseōs*) that is wrapped in eternal contemplation but does *not* deliberate about temporal, mutable affairs and practical actions. That is, the realm in which tragic or moral *hamartiai* can occur seems ontologically removed from Aristotle's god. This god cannot "forgive *hamartiai*" any more than it can lead into temptation or reach down into the soup of circumstances to expiate impurity, heal disease or delusion, or "deliver us from evil." To pray to "him" to do

66. *Eth. Nic.* 1142b.7–9 (ἐπεὶ ὁ μὲν κακῶς βουλευόμενος ἀμαρτάνει, ὁ δ' εὖ ὀρθῶς βουλεύεται, δῆλον ὅτι ὀρθότης τις ἢ εὐβουλία ἐστίν). The expected antonym of ὀρθότης would make bad deliberation ἀμαρτία.

67. The difficulty of virtue and the ease of vice is a theme for Hesiod (*Op.* 287–92), Prodicus's fable, "The Choice of Heracles" (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.1.21–34), Plato's Adeimantus (*Resp.* 364d1–2, quoting Hesiod), and ultimately Mt 7:13–14 (cf. Taylor, *Classics and the Bible*, 32–33).

68. See Gerard F. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 474–75; Bremmer, *Hamartia*, 111–12.

any of this would be a category mistake. Insulated, and perhaps altogether isolated from mutable particulars, this pure *nous* must be indifferent to particular actions, whether sinful "misses" and omissions or virtuous "hits."

If this analysis is fair, then Aristotle's ethical and religious thought has, in some respects, a quite different tenor from Plato's. Turning to Plato as our final case study, let us sample his rich deployment of *hamartia* cognates in political, ethical, and Socratic contexts as an entry into some of his broader ethico-religious ideas. One must give pride of place to the Socratic principle, "knowledge is virtue"—or rather to its logical converse, "ignorance is vice." Here, the cognitive connotations of *hamartia* (habitually contrasted with *orthotēs*, rightness) inform many separate discussions. Socrates's speculations of a "royal *technē*" draw not only on analogies with other crafts (especially medicine and ship navigation), but also on the conceit that the "true" ruler will not make "mistakes" and will be technically (and perhaps ethically) "unerring" or "infallible" (ἀναμάρτητος).⁶⁹ A more humorous (though little noticed) variation may be the reference in *Theaetetus* to a children's game: those interlocutors, Socrates teases, who make mistakes or "misses" will become the "donkeys," while the one who comes out "without error" (ἀναμάρτητος) will be "king" over the others.⁷⁰ Yet while these discussions of a royal *technē*, mathematician-kings, and direct theocracy flirt with the ideal of infallibility, they also query whether this epistemic ideal is too high for merely human politics *here*.

In more purely ethical discussions, Socrates's principle that "nobody does evil willingly" commonly employs *hamartia* cognates.⁷¹ In *Protagoras*, for instance, people "err" in their choice of pleasures and pains due to their lack of the proper knowledge

69. See, e.g., *Resp.* 339c–342b, including questions about whether rulers are "unerring" (ἀναμάρτητοί) or able "to err" (ἀμαρτεῖν) and "mistake" their own self-interest (διαμαρτάνειν τοῦ ἑαυτοῖς βελτίστου). Cf. Aristotle, *Politics* 296b9–c4 (regarding errors in medicine and politics); *Tht.* 177e4–8. Cf. Aristotle on faults, *hamartiai* of Spartan (*Politics* 1270a9, 1338b12), Cretan (1272b2) and tyrannical (1310b6) constitutions.

70. *Tht.* 146a1–5 (ὁ δ' ἂν περιγένηται ἀναμάρτητος βασιλεύσει ἡμῶν).

71. See, e.g., *Apology* 26a1–a4, *Protagoras* 345d9–e4 (οὐδένα ἀνθρώπων ἐκόντα ἔξαμαρτάνειν), *Grg.* 488a2–b1 (οὐχ ἐκὼν ἔξαμαρτάνω ἀλλ' ἀμαθία τῆ ἐμῆ). *Resp.* 336e2–4 (ἄκοντες ἀμαρτάνομεν).

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345d9–e4 (οὐδένα ἀνθρώπων ἐκόντα ἁμαρτάνω ἀλλ’ ἀμαθία τῆ ἐμῆ), *Resp.*

of the “measuring art.”⁷² Here Socrates’s language of making the “right choice” (*orthē hairēsis*) of pleasure and pain and having the knowledge to calculate pleasures—the greater and lesser, the “excess” and “deficiency” thereof—foreshadows Aristotle’s doctrine of *phronēsis* and virtue. Here, practical deliberation is also brought to bear on psychic matters (pleasures, emotions) so that one can make the “right” *hairēsis* in each situation, though Aristotle rejects the notion of a merely quantitative calculation. Plato’s Socrates, for his part, speaks of the calculating art as the potential “salvation of human life” (ἡ σωτηρία τοῦ βίου).

In a slightly different way, both Socratic principles inform the great Platonic myths of divine punishment. Here political and ethical arguments combine in a vision of the divine society that binds the living and the dead, mortals and immortals alike: earthly vices, crimes, and injustices are ultimately *sins* (often *hamartia* cognates) against a greater order. Punishment is enacted for good: either as an “education” that would “release” souls from their self-imposed ignorance (i.e., vice), or as an education to deter others from wrong. A related metaphor makes punishment a medicine for psychic disease. If justice and other vices are disorders of the soul, then divine punishment is the salve restoring their natural equilibrium.⁷³ This metaphor is evident in the striking classification of sins into the “curable” and

72. See, e.g., *Protagoras* 356e8–357d7 (τί ἂν ἔσφζεν ἡμῖν τὸν βίον; ἄρ’ ἂν οὐκ ἐπιστήμη; καὶ ἄρ’ ἂν οὐ μετρητικὴ τις, ἐπειδὴ περὶ ὑπερβολῆς τε καὶ ἐνδείας ἐστὶν ἡ τέχνη . . . ἐπεὶ δὲ διὰ τὴν ἡδονῆς τε καὶ λύπης ἐν ὀρθῇ τῇ αἰρέσει ἐφάνη ἡμῖν ἡ σωτηρία τοῦ βίου οὕσα . . . ὁμολογήκατε ἐπιστήμης ἐνδεία ἑξαμαρτάνειν περὶ τὴν τῶν ἡδονῶν αἴρεσιν καὶ λυπῶν τοὺς ἑξαμαρτάνοντας).

73. On virtue as psychic “health,” see *Resp.* 444c–e (Ἀρετὴ . . . ὑγίαιά τε τις ἂν εἴη κάλλος καὶ εὐεξία ψυχῆς, κακία δὲ νόσος τε καὶ αἴσχος καὶ ἀσθένεια); Anthony P. J. Kenny, “Mental Health in Plato’s *Republic*,” in *The Anatomy of the Soul* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973), esp. 1–27; Gerasimos Santas, *Understanding Plato’s Republic* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 207–12. Boesche compares Plato with Freud, for whom “mental health involved a proper balance of ego, superego, and id” (Roger Boesche, *Theories of Tyranny: From Plato to Arendt* [University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010], 28). On justice as a “medicine of evil” that restores temperance, see *Grg.* 478d4–7 (ιατρικὴ γίγνεται πονηρίας ἢ δίκης). Aristotle also uses the metaphor: “healthy” states are able to endure many “faults” (ἁμαρτίαι) (*Politics* 1320b33–39). New Testament language too associates *hamartia* with sickness, as in the healing miracles in Mt 9:1–8, Mk 2:1–12, Lk 5:17–26. On this association, cf. Parker, *Miasma*, 236–37.

“incurable.” There is punishment as education/medicine for the former, but for the latter (since redemption is impossible) fierce punishments, enacted as “paradigms, spectacles and warnings” to others.⁷⁴ The incurables (Socrates generalizes) are almost always from the ranks of the great—kings, potentates, tyrants—and so he alludes approvingly to Homer’s image of Tantalus, Sisyphus and Tityus punished. Such visions of cosmic justice cap Socrates’s persistent preference for justice over injustice (*Republic*), and even for “suffering injustice rather than perpetrating it” (*Gorgias*)—a preference that may be borne out in his refusal to violate the laws of Athens by fleeing execution (*Critias*).

The same spirit is evident in his final words to the Athenian jurors. Socrates does not *quite* forgive those who condemn him, because “they know not what they do,” but he continues to reason with them, possibly because the true requital for ignorant “mistakes” is correction, education, and “divine” philosophy.⁷⁵

74. See *Grg.* 525b6–c8, which contrasts the ἀνίατοι (οἳτοι οἱ ἀνίασιμα ἀμαρτήματα ἀμάρτωσιν) with others the punishment of whose ἀμαρτίαι will serve as παραδείγματα . . . θεάματα καὶ νοουθητήματα. The metaphor reappears in *Phaedo* 113a–114c, where the “incurables” include the worst temple-robbers and murderers. On the other hand, those who commit great but “curable” sins (ἰάσιμα μεγάλα ἡμαρτηκέναι ἀμαρτήματα) include people who do violence to their parents or commit murder. The latter, to be “cured,” must repent (μεταμέλον) for the rest of their lives and must “supplicate” and “persuade” their victims in Tartarus to “let them go out” (ἰκετεύουσι καὶ δέονται ἔσσαι σφᾶς ἐκβῆναι). Griswold passes over the passage with a throwaway mention in a footnote, and in his disappointing omission of Christianity he misses how strikingly close the vocabulary of these supplications is to the “forgive us our sins” of the New Testament. At the same time, one should note that Socrates concludes his vision by a reference to divine justice, not mercy (*eleos*) or forgiveness (*suggnōmē*).

75. Griswold’s paraphrase (“he predicts that ‘vengeance will come’ . . . evidently at the hands of his followers” [*Forgiveness*, 10n13]) is misleading. Socrates’s prediction of rational *elenchus* (i.e., “punishment” as education) at the hands of younger followers is hardly τιμωρία in Homeric style. Socrates does not forgive, yet his calm pronouncement of a parting of the ways (*Apology* 39c1–d9) has the air of a tranquil letting go—the words of a man who has risen above the crowd and its noise. And indeed, as a “witness” to the truth, Socrates’s vow to obey God rather than the Athenians (*Apology* 29d–e) has many Jewish and Christian parallels and even echoes (e.g., Paul on the Areopagus: see Talbert, *Reading Acts*, 45, 54, 152–53). In light of this, one might well juxtapose Socrates’s final speeches in the trial with Jesus’ final words of forgiveness (Lk 23:34), themselves echoed by Stephen and other early martyrs (see Talbert, *Reading Acts*, 65–66). For recent contributions to the age-long juxtaposition of Socrates and Jesus, see Emily Wilson, *The Death of Socrates* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,

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Similarly, incidents throughout his trial and death (as “recorded”
 by Plato) use *hamartia* cognates in ways that verge more obvi-
 ously on the notion of sin. In speaking with Euthyphro before
 his trial, Socrates fears that in the mind of his accuser Meletus,
 he “errs/sins with his innovations about the divine.”⁷⁶ In the *Apol-
 ogy*, he more boldly states that he is giving his defense speech
 on behalf of the Athenians (and not himself), “for fear that if
 they condemn him, they would commit some *sin* concerning the
 gods’ gift to them.”⁷⁷ In prison, the personified laws of Athens
 ask him whether he will do anybody any good by “transgress-
 ing and erring” (sinning) against them.⁷⁸ The whole trial was
 of course for impiety, tried under King Archon (responsible for
 religious crime), since in Athens (or polytheistic Greece) there
 was no sharp separation of the secular and the sacred. Yet, in the
 face of critiques of traditional religion and ancestral *nomoi* (e.g.,
 by pre-Socratic and Sophistic thinkers), Plato seeks to ground
 more consciously these all too human institutions on knowledge
 of their “divine” source.

The Socratic principles then, and the *hamartia* cog-
 nates that may reflect them, lead on naturally to Plato’s great
 thoughts on divinity, goodness, evil—a theology by which Plato
 would essentially revolutionize society. The basic theses of his
 theology—that the divine is good, cause only of what is good,
 is not deceptive or many-formed, but simple and changelessly
 perfect—are formulated in the *Republic* in express opposition to
 Homer and Hesiod, and enacted, theoretically, into an ideal my-
 thology, art, and political constitution.⁷⁹ The addition that the

2007); and Paul W. Gooch, *Reflections on Jesus and Socrates: Word and Silence* (New
 Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

76. *Euthyphro* 5a3–8 (καινοτομοῦντα περὶ τῶν θεῶν ἔξαμαρτάνειν) (emphasis
 added); cf. 6a6–9. For his part, Euthyphro defines piety first as what he is do-
 ing now, prosecuting those who commit some *adikia* (murder, temple robbery)
 or some similar *hamartia* (5d8–e2).

77. *Apology* 30d5–e1 (ὕπερ ὑμῶν, μὴ τι ἔξαμαρτήτε περὶ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ δόσιν ὑμῖν)
 (translation mine).

78. *Crito* 53a6–b1 (παραβάς και ἔξαμαρτάνων); cf. *Il.* 9.501 (ὕπερβήη και
 ἀμάρτη), quoted above.

79. On the divine nature, see *Resp.* 379b–383c. *Contra* Homer, see, e.g.,
Resp. 379c9–e2 (Socrates quoting, condemning *Il.* 24.527–32) or 381d (reject-
 ing *Od.* 17.485–86).

divine is *not* jealous, but positively generous in its inclination to overflow or cause another as like itself as possible, underlies in the *Timaeus* a mythico-scientific attempt to construe the cosmos and all its denizens as maximally beautiful and good. The “second-best” society in the *Laws* is based on the propositions that the gods exist, care for mankind, and cannot be bribed (*pace* Homer’s Phoenix and the whole culture of petitionary offerings, statues, temples). The laws of Magnesia are sacred laws: they reflect the changeless order of the heavens, and are laid down by wise legislators whose legacy should be maintained scrupulously. So too in the *Republic’s* *kallipolis*, the less knowledgeable workers and auxiliaries know enough to respect and obey the guardians, who rule by grace of their knowledge of the Good. But the best condition would be to be ruled by god directly, as is suggested in the myth of the *Statesman*. All three societies are variations of the principle that knowledge of the divine order should inform the political order.⁸⁰ More generally still, the Platonic divine is associated with the truly real, the unchanging, and the Good. Before this divine “light,” evil is driven into the shadows, as it were: evil is privation of good, without an independent or even real existence in a cosmos where everything reflects to some degree its divine original (whether that is named the Ideas, the Idea of the Good, or the Demiurge’s paradigm). Ultimately Socrates’s ethical propositions are given metaphysical depth: knowledge of the divine reality *equals* virtue and social cohesion, while those who “miss” it descend to depths of wickedness and madness co-extensive with their ignorance. Worst of all, the most fallen, and thus least godlike, are tyrannical souls—or in the logic of the *Laws*, unrepentant atheists.

Thus, somewhat paradoxically, despite stressing the primacy of the divine good (in various forms), Plato also demonstrates a continuous awareness of the limits of its efficacy. The Demiurge translates eternity into the motions of time and mathematical forms into matter, but they hold the imprint imperfectly (*Timaeus*). The soul that once contemplated Ideas loses its wings and falls into the heaviness of body (*Phaedrus*). The sun’s light is present in the cave (through the puppet masters’ fire),

80. At least this is my argument in *Philosopher-Kings of Antiquity* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), 19–43.

ively generous in its inclination to like itself as possible, underlies in its attempt to construe the cosmos as maximally beautiful and good. The *Laws* is based on the propositions that the gods are just and good, that mankind, and cannot be bribed (*pace* the culture of petitionary offerings, the laws of Magnesia are sacred laws: they refer to the heavens, and are laid down by the gods and should be maintained scrupulously. The guardians, the less knowledgeable workers, should respect and obey the guardians, who have knowledge of the Good. But the best are ruled by god directly, as is suggested in the *Laws*. All three societies are variations of the divine order should inform the laws. Generally still, the Platonic divine is the Good, the unchanging, and the Good. Evil is driven into the shadows, as it is in the *Republic*, without an independent or even a shadow where everything reflects to some degree. Whether that is named the Ideas, the Idea of the Good (the paradigm). Ultimately Socrates's argument is in metaphysical depth: knowledge of the Good and social cohesion, while those who are in the depths of wickedness and madness coincide. Worst of all, the most fallen, and the most wicked souls—or in the logic of the *Laws*, the most wicked souls—paradoxically, despite stressing the Good (in various forms), Plato also stresses the awareness of the limits of its efficacy. The eternal into the motions of time does not matter, but they hold the imprint of the soul that once contemplated Ideas in the heaviness of body (*Phaedrus*). The soul is saved (through the puppet masters' fire),

yet darkened by shadow (*Republic*). Divine beauty is present in the beautiful sciences, laws, poems, bodies—yet diminished somehow (*Symposium*). Some fatal neglect of the “perfect number” brings about the decline of the ideal *kallipolis*, and knowledge of the Good fades as cities degenerate through the various constitutions: from timocracy to oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny.⁸¹ In each dialogue, the interlocutors know at some level the universal in question, yet struggle to articulate it perfectly. Certain individuals brusquely assert themselves over and against others, even while still part of the conversation. A Thrasymachus, Alcibiades, or Callicles look to the tyrant as the human ideal; their pride would reach a pinnacle in the *eros tyrannos*, which in the soul (as in the state) is the “king” of all drones, the chief source of evil—in St. Thomas's language, the “capital vice,” or in the language of the *Catechism*, the “predominant sin or our ruling passion.”

In the *Laws*, the chief vice is identified as “self-love” in a resonant passage worth quoting at length:

Of all evils the greatest is one which in the souls of most men is innate [ἐμφυτον], and which a man is always excusing in himself and never correcting; I mean, what is expressed in the saying that “Every man by nature is and ought to be his own friend.” Whereas the excessive love of self is in reality the source to each man of all offences [τὸ δὲ ἀληθὲς γὰρ πάντων ἁμαρτημάτων διὰ τὴν σφόδρα ἑαυτοῦ φιλίαν αἰτιον ἐκάστῳ γίγνεται ἐκάστοτε]; for the lover is blinded about the beloved, so that he judges wrongly of the just, the good, and the honourable, and thinks that he ought always to prefer himself to the truth. But he who would be a great man ought to regard, not himself or his interests, but what is just, whether the just act be his own or that of another. Through a similar error men are induced to fancy that their own ignorance is wisdom, and thus we who may be truly said to know nothing, think that we know all things; and because we will not let others act for us in what we do not know, we are compelled to act amiss [ἁμαρτάνειν] ourselves. Wherefore let every man avoid excess of self-love, and condescend to follow a better man than himself, not allowing any false shame to stand in the way.⁸²

81. Regarding the “perfect number,” see *Resp.* 546b–d.

82. *Laws* 731d6–732b4 (trans. Benjamin Jowett).

ent in *Philosopher-Kings of Antiquity* (London: 1994), 43.

The final exhortation to imitate an excellent paradigm resounds with the whole natural theology we have been sketching, and with Plato's celebrated call to *theōsis*.⁸³ In addition, it may put one in mind of St. Matthew and other sinners (ἁμαρτωλοί) who abandoned their selves and self-love to follow Jesus—a better man. The passage as a whole certainly anticipates Plotinus's analysis of evil as a turning away from the One, a misplacing of love, just as *eros tyrannos* is a perversion of the innate *eros* toward the divine. The passage may look forward also to Kant's notion of a "radical evil" in the will, an inclination or even temptation toward the sensual and nonrational; or to Freud's selfish *id*. It looks forward to St. Augustine's *Confessions*, where he searches his own soul in memory, and finds there the self-love that tempted him to repeat the primal sin.

Finally, this passage of Plato's old age may verge on ground similar to that of St. Paul when he speaks of the mystery and reality of original sin:

It was through one man that sin [ἡ ἁμαρτία] came into the world, and through sin [διὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας] death, and thus death has spread through the whole human race because everyone has sinned [ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον]. Sin already existed in the world before there was any law, even though sin is not reckoned when there is no law.⁸⁴

The Greeks, from Homer and Hesiod to Plato and Aristotle, did not know the Mosaic Law or its later fulfillment. The highlights of their religious history see only a wavering sense that the gods legislate for human action: stronger in Hesiod's *Works and Days* than Homer's *Iliad*, stronger (in a negative way) in the "tragic" vision of jealous gods, and stronger still in Plato's now optimistic reevaluation of the divine. Throughout, there was always an anxiety that human beings can commit *hamartia* before the gods—whether by omitting sacrifice, by "thinking big" and hubristically courting *nemesis*, or by "missing" fundamental truths and throwing one's soul into disorder. Homeric, tragic, and Platonic varieties of sin already existed in the Greek world before any Corinthians or Athenians heard "the law" evangelized. In

83. *Thi.* 176a8–b3.

84. Rom 5:12–13 (NJB) (emphasis added).

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relative ignorance of "the law" of a loving Father, the Greeks
 gave relatively little "reckoning" of sin. Of course, as we have
 seen, Homer, Hesiod, Plato, Aristotle, and others all do evalu-
 ate sin, each in his own distinctive way. But the notion is not
 dominant, not even in Plato, and one must abstract it from the
 labyrinthine language of delusion, justice, virtue, and knowledge
 in which it is enfolded. One can regard this essay therefore as a
 modest and indirect commentary on Paul's statement: for Greek
 culture as a whole, with its weak sense of divine legislation and
 love for mankind, sin was not given the strong "reckoning" and
 singular attention that it *has* received in Christian cultures—even
 from the very beginning, when Christ taught his disciples how
 to pray. □

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