EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND GREEK PHILOSOPHY:

THE ARGUMENT OF ACTS 17:16-34 IN LIGHT OF THE
PHILOSOPHICAL AND RELIGIOUS DEBATES OF EARLY
POST-HELLENISTIC TIMES

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By

Monique Cuany

Corpus Christi College

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CONTENT

ABSTRACT

The speech in Athens (Acts 17:16–34) is a key text to assess the relationship between the early Christian movement and the Graeco-Roman world in Acts, but its interpretation has led to diametrically opposed conclusions, some seeing it as a rapprochement with Graeco-Roman wisdom, and others as incompatible with, and condemnatory of, Gentile religiosity and philosophy. For both sides, however, the Christological conclusion of the speech has remained a puzzle, both in terms of its connection with the rest of the argument, and its accessibility to the Greek audience of Acts' narrative.

This dissertation suggests that the speech must be interpreted in the context of the religious grammar and the philosophical debates between Hellenistic schools in early post-Hellenistic times. It argues that this approach sheds light on the argument of the speech and its Christological conclusion, and leads to a new evaluation of the relationship between the Christian message and Hellenistic philosophy, and the way Acts pictures the kerygmatic proclamation in a Gentile context.

After overviewing past approaches to the pericope in chapter one, chapter two examines the narrative framework of the speech (17:16-23) and argues that the discourse must be interpreted as addressing the subject of proper piety to a philosophically educated audience. The third chapter presents a study of the much-debated word δεισιδαιμονία which highlights the methodological problems of past studies and challenges the current scholarly consensus that the word means either 'piety' or 'superstition,' while chapter four analyses what Stoic and Epicurean philosophers taught about *deisidaimonia* and proper piety between the first century BCE and the first century CE. Chapter five then re-examines the argument of the speech in Acts 17 in light of the religious and philosophical contexts highlighted by the previous chapters, showing the function of Christology in its argument. Finally, the conclusion discusses the implications of this new interpretation for assessing the relationship between Early Christianity, Greek philosophy and the Graeco-Roman world more generally in Acts, and Luke's literary purposes.

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Monique Cuany

10 May, 2018

DECLARATIONS

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing that is the outcome of work done in collaboration. This dissertation is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted or will submit for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared on the title page. The text of this dissertation (including footnotes but excluding prefatory material and bibliography) does not exceed 80,000 words in length as set by the Faculty of Divinity of the University of Cambridge.

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations of biblical and other ancient writings generally follow the conventions in P. H. Alexander *et al*., eds., *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical and early Christian Studies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999).

The additional abbreviations used in the thesis are provided here for the reader's convenience.

EOD   "English Oxford Living Dictionaries." Oxford University Press, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/english.

LSJ   Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones. 1996. *A Greek-English Lexicon.* 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon.

MC   Personal translation [Monique Cuany]

OCD   Hornblower, Simon and Antony Spawforth, eds. 2005. *Oxford Classical Dictionary.* 3rd rev. ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

PHI   "Searchable Greek Inscriptions: A Scholarly Tool in Progress." The Packhard Humanities Institute, https://epigraphy.packhum.org/.

TLG   "Thesaurus Linguae Graecae: A Digital Library of Greek Literature." University of California, http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/.

TDNT   Kittel, Gerhard and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. 1964. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.* 10 vols. Translated and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

TLNT   Spicq, Ceslas. 1994. *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament.* 3 vols. Translated and edited by James D. Ernest. Peabody: Hendrickson.

SVF   Arnim, Hans Friedrich August von. 1903-24. *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta*. 4 vols. Leipzig: Teubner.

Usener   Usener, Hermann, ed. 2010 [1887]. *Epicurea*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Greek and Latin authors

Arius Didymus
    Epit.   *Epitome of Stoic Ethics*
Cicero
    ND   *De natura deorum (On the Nature of the Gods)*
Epicurus
    Ep. Hdt.   *Epistle to Herodotus*
    Ep. Men.   *Epistle to Menoeceus*
    Ep. Pyth.   *Epistle to Pythocles*
    ΚΔ   *Kuriai Doxai* (*Principal Doctrines*)
Lucretius
    RN   *De rerum natura*
Philodemus
    P. Herc. 1251   *[On Choices and Avoidances]*
Seneca
    [Superst.]   *[De superstitione]*

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1.   The Areopagus speech in Acts and Scholarship

The passage in Acts (17:16-34) depicting the apostle Paul debating with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers and delivering a speech to the Areopagus in Athens constitutes the oldest account of a confrontation between Christianity and Graeco-Roman religion and philosophy.[1] Situated in the ancient cultural capital of Greece and penned with literary skills which have often drawn superlatives from exegetes,[2] this well-known scene has become a symbol of the encounter between Christianity and Graeco-Roman culture and its wisdom.[3]

In the book of Acts, this pericope is indeed one of the two *sole* descriptions of a Christian speech delivered to a broader Gentile audience.[4] This quasi-unique status in a narrative which describes the spread of Christianity from Jerusalem (Acts 1) to Rome (Acts 28) led many past and current exegetes to the conclusion that the speech in Athens is 'the' or at least 'a' climax in the whole book. For example, in his landmark article published in 1939, Martin Dibelius wrote:

> The scene in the book of Acts in which Paul preaches to the people of Athens (17.19-34) denotes, and is intended to denote, a climax in the book. The whole account of the scene testifies to that: the speech on the Areopagus is the only sermon reported by the author which is preached to the Gentiles by the apostle to the Gentiles.[5]

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[1]Following the current convention in scholarship, the author of the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts will be referred to as 'Luke' in the present work. For the sake of convenience, the passage of Acts 17:16-34 will sometimes be referred to simply as 'Acts 17.'

[2]E.g., Harnack 1906:321: 'das wundervollste Stück der Apostelgeschichte.' cf. Mason 2012:165-166: 'an author of considerable worldly knowledge and literary ability.'

[3]Conzelmann 1966:217. cf. Johnson 1992:318: Luke made this account 'the exemplary meeting between Jerusalem and Athens, and the anticipation of the Christianized Hellenistic culture for which it provided the symbol.'

[4]Cf. the brief words addressed to the crowds in Lystra (Acts 14:15-17). As Soards (1994:11) points out, the categorization of the speeches between mission- and trial- speeches in Acts is largely artificial, since the judicial speeches often contain the same elements as the *Missionsreden*. Hence the reference here to speeches to a 'broader' Gentile audience to distinguish them from speeches addressed to Gentile officials in trial narratives.

[5]Dibelius 1939:260. The German scholar also emphasized the style and compactness of the speech which suggest its importance.

Along the same lines, but proceeding more from an analysis of the structure of Luke's complete narrative and his theological purposes, Paul Schubert argued that the speech in Athens is 'the final climactic part of his exposition' because it 'is not only a hellenized but also a universalized version of Luke's βουλή-theology.'[6] Less categorical about the climactic status of the speech in the book of Acts, Jacques Dupont nonetheless concluded that Luke had sought to make this pericope the climax of Paul's *missionary* career. For the Belgian scholar, the fact that Luke chose to situate Paul's discourse to the Gentiles in Athens, a city in which his ministry was clearly not as important as in Corinth and Ephesus, and which was not at all an important political place, shows that he wants to sketch a symbolic scene of significance: la rencontre du message évangélique avec la sagesse des Grecs.[7]

Of course, past scholars have also been impressed by the compactness, the rhetorical flourish, and the sophisticated interaction with Greek philosophy displayed in the pericope of Acts 17. Clearly Luke seemed to have crafted this passage with particular care and thus given it a special importance. But above all, it is Acts' apparent concern with the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles and Paul as a 'light to the nations' (Acts 13:47) which played a crucial role in their assessment of the centrality of this pericope in the account of the first Christian historian.[8]

Today, few exegetes would argue that Acts 17 is *the* climax of Luke's narrative.[9] There is indeed little in the overall structure of Acts to suggest that this pericope is climactic or even central in Acts.[10] But it has remained a crucial text to assess how Luke situates or describes Christianity's position towards the Gentile world, a problematic which lies at the heart of the Lukan project and has been central in scholarship on Luke-Acts for at least two centuries. As Daniel Marguerat summarizes:

> How does he situate Christianity between Jerusalem and Rome—or, alternatively, between Israel and the Roman Empire? / Without exaggeration, one could say that the whole history of the interpretation of Luke-Acts unfolds from this problematic. Anyone who wants to establish

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[6]Schubert 1968:260-61.

[7]Dupont 1984:384-385. Cf. Also Vielhauer (1966:34) and Schneider (1982:231).

[8]The importance of this point is underestimated by Rowe, who concludes that the assessment of those scholars is due to 'the academic inclination of the interpreters in questions that has led them to value the explicitly philosophical speech above other parts of the narrative' (Rowe 2009: 191, n.82). For Luke as the first Christian historian, cf. Marguerat 2004.

[9]See, however, Fitzmyer (1998:601) who calls it a 'major speech,' and Schnabel (2005:176) who describes it as 'a key passage in the Book of Acts.' Rothschild (2014:1) speaks of 'a literary crest of the overall narrative.'

[10]As Johnson (1992:319) rightly notes: 'It is not the end of the book, not its singular climax, but another in a series of symbolic encounters between the word of the gospel and the many aspects of the world it was destined to transform.'

the theological aim of Luke's writing must first determine how the author positions Christianity in relation to Judaism and in relation to the pagan world.[11]

The pericope of Acts 17 has thus played an important role in scholarship's attempt to understand Acts' attitude towards the Gentiles, the Graeco-Roman world more generally, and thus Luke's overall purpose in writing the Acts of the Apostles.

For example, for Marguerat, Acts 17 is an illustration of Luke's purpose to present 'a Christianity between Jerusalem and Rome' and illustrates his 'theological programme of integration.'[12] According to the Swiss scholar, the author of Acts has composed a speech which can be read from a Greek and a Jewish perspective until verse 31, thus underscoring that God is the God of the Greek and the Jew.[13] Luke uses this device of semantic ambivalence several times in his work in the service of his theological project of presenting 'Christianity as both the fulfilment of the promises of Scriptures and as the answer to the religious quest of the Graeco-Roman world.'[14]

Very differently, Jacob Jervell sees the speech as wholly condemnatory of the Gentiles. Not only so, but the discourse—which is the only substantial speech delivered to a broader Gentile audience in Acts—is *not* a missionary speech, for it does *not* present the gospel. For Jervell this substantiates his thesis articulated since the 1970s over against the then general tendency among scholars to read Acts as an anti-Jewish and pro-Roman document, that the book of Acts is not concerned with the progress of the gospel among Gentiles outside of the synagogue, but only among Jews and God-fearers.[15] According to this interpretation then, Graeco-Roman culture cannot in any way serve as a preparation for, or an ally in, the proclamation of the gospel. Only the Jewish context—i.e. the synagogue—and the Jewish Scriptures serve this function for Luke.

Another reading has been advanced recently by Kavin Rowe in an article published in *NTS* in 2011. Arguing against the interpretation of the Areopagus speech (Acts 17:16-34) as an attempt at theological rapprochement (*Anknüpfungspunkt*) between Christianity and Greek philosophy, Rowe proposes that it describes a fundamentally different grammar for the whole of life which conflicts with pagan tradition. The message presented by the speech in Athens is thus fundamentally in conflict with Greek philosophical teaching. Rowe's article was an extension of his treatment of the Areopagus

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[11]Marguerat 2004:65.

[12]Marguerat 2004:65-66. Marguerat develops this thesis in his essay 'A Christianity between Jerusalem and Rome' in Marguerat 2004, and in his commentary (2015).

[13]Marguerat 2004:71-72.

[14]Marguerat 2004:76.

[15]Jervell 1998:455: 'Dies liegt daran, dass die Heidenmission für Lukas nicht mit der Areopagrede und dem ausserjüdischen Heidentum zusammenhängt, sondern mit den Gottesfürtigen in den Synagogen. Lukas hat also die knappen Nachrichten aus dem Bericht des Paulus in Athen VV 16f. und 34 zu einer Szene ausgestaltet, die das Nein der Kirche zum ausserjüdischen Heidentum darlegt.' Cf. Jervell 1972.

speech in his book *World Upside Down* (OUP 2009), where he defends the thesis that the book of Acts depicts the early Christian movement as subversive of Graeco-Roman culture, but emphatically innocent of political sedition.

A final example is provided by Joshua Jipp's article published in *JBL* two years later, where he contends that Luke has composed a speech which resonates with *both* Jewish and Greek traditions, thereby appropriating elements of Greek culture both to criticize aspects of it, and to exalt 'the Christian movement as comprising the best features of Greco-Roman philosophical sensibilities.'[16] Jipp points out that this reading corroborates other scholarly contributions on Acts which have highlighted the way Luke appropriates elements of Graeco-Roman script and culture, mimicking aspects of it in order to demonstrate that the Christian movement contains the best aspects of Graeco-Roman tradition and criticize competing movements.[17]

As those examples show, Acts 17 has become a window or a test case through which Luke's view of early Christianity's relation to the Gentiles and Graeco-Roman culture, including its politics, philosophy, and piety is assessed, and thus also to some degree his literary purpose. At the same time, the strong differences and even incongruity between those interpretations of Acts 17 draws attention to the enduring conundrum which has marked the history of interpretation of this fascinating episode: the tension between the discourse's criticism of the Athenians' religion as 'ignorance' and idolatry, and yet the speech's apparent appeal to Greek philosophical religious common places to articulate the Christian message. As a result, the Areopagus speech's stance towards the Graeco-Roman world and pagan religiosity in particular has long been interpreted in very different and even radically opposite ways. At one end of the spectrum interpreters argue that the speech is to be understood along the lines of an anti-idol polemic denouncing the idolatry of the Athenians. The discourse is thus critical of Athenian religiosity through and through.[18] At the other end, the speech is interpreted as a discourse on the true knowledge of God which, building upon the 'inkling' of the notion of the true God demonstrated by Athenian religiosity and/or philosophy, presents the true and only God to the Athenians and corrects their misunderstandings.[19]

To shed new light on this enduring debate, the present project suggests a fresh perspective on this pericope based on a different approach to the 'Greek' material included in the speech. Before describing the approach taken in the present work, however, it will be helpful to discusses some of the ways past scholarship has interpreted the speech's use and allusions to Greek philosophy.

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[16]Jipp 2012:576 and 568 respectively.

[17]Jipp 2012:569.

[18]E.g. Gärtner 1955; Dunn 1996; Jervell 1998.

[19]E.g. Dibelius 1939; Haenchen 1971.

1.2.   Some main lines in past scholarship

Since the earliest times, exegetes have noticed the presence of Greek material and echoes to philosophy in the Areopagus speech. Apart from the explicit quote from Aratus who is referred to as 'one of the poets' of the Athenians in v. 28, several motifs of the speech recall Greek philosophical formulations, such as the assertion that the divinity does not live in temples, that it has no need, or the divine appointment of seasons. While the great majority of exegetes in the 20th century has concurred that the speech in Athens is hellenized, there has been wide disagreement as to the extent or nature of this hellenization, and how it is to be interpreted in this pericope.[20] This section discusses some of the main ways this phenomenon has been interpreted since the early 20th century, highlighting some of the problems and methodological concerns created by past approaches but also how some contributions point towards a new possibility to examine this question.[21]

1.2.1.   Jewish-Christian *Grundmotiv* and Stoic *Begleitmotiv* (Norden)

It is Eduard Norden who, with *Agnostos Theos* (1913), brought the question of the relationship between Jewish and Greek material in the speech to the fore of scholarly discussion. Norden saw the discourse in Athens as reflecting a tradition of mission speeches on the true knowledge of God. Highlighting the many parallels between the speech in Athens and the other speeches in Acts, he argued that the discourse is composed of a basic '*jüdisch-christliches Grundmotiv*' into which has been inserted '*ein stoisches Begleitmotiv*' which represents an adaptation of this basic motif to the Hellenistic audience at hand. This *Begleitmotiv,* expressed in verses 26-28, refers to the assertion that although the divine is invisible, its existence is revealed through the visible world, a common theme in Hellenistic philosophy and especially in Stoicism. According to Norden, the author of the speech inherited the practice of including Greek knowledge about the divine from Hellenistic Judaism, which often used support from Greek philosophers who had criticized popular conceptions of the gods in their anti-idol polemics. In particular, the Stoa and its pantheism provided an easy bridge to Jewish

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[20]'Hellenization' is used in a broad sense, and includes, for example, the adoption of Greek form, argumentation, terminology or authors.

[21]The literature on this pericope is almost endless, but reviews of past scholarship remain almost non-existent, even in the two unique (!) monographs consecrated to this passage (Gärtner 1955; Rothschild 2014). To my knowledge, the most complete overview of scholarship is found in Zweck's unpublished dissertation, where he traces what scholars have said about natural revelation in Acts 17 (1985:1-37). See also the overview in Dupont 1984:396-403. Our analysis neither seeks comprehensiveness nor to differentiate between all nuances adopted by past exegetes. Rather it focuses on some of the major interpretations which have been or are still influential in scholarship, or contributions which are particularly helpful for our methodological reflection in the next section.

and Christian monotheism. For Norden, this arrangement between Jewish-Christian and philosophical motifs reflects an adaptation of the apostolic preaching to its Hellenistic audience, a practice which was anticipated in Hellenistic Judaism.[22]

Although several of Norden's other proposals in *Agnostos Theos* failed to convince exegetes,[23] his explanation of the speech in terms of a Jewish-Christian main motif into which are integrated Stoic motifs set the debate on the relationship between Jewish and Greek material in the speech on the agenda of scholarly discussion on the Areopagus for much of the 20th century, and many scholars were to view the relationship between Jewish and Greek motifs along similar lines.

1.2.2.　A philosophical sermon on the knowledge of God (Dibelius, Pohlenz, Balch)

While Norden had interpreted the philosophical material of the speech as a *Begleitmotiv* integrated in a typical missionary speech, Dibelius (1939) argued that the whole speech is a *philosophical sermon* on the true knowledge of God.[24] Departing from Norden's form criticism and the question of the influence of tradition on the speech, Dibelius began his analysis with the discourse itself which he saw as a 'sinnvolles Ganzes' whose composition had been significantly shaped by the author. Starting with verses 26-27, he interpreted them as a reference to the manifestation of divine providence in the arrangement of the seasons and the habitable zones of the earth which, in philosophy, serve as proofs of divine existence and providence and 'are intended to induce men to seek after God.'[25] He thus concluded that the rest of the speech must also be interpreted against this philosophical background to become intelligible.

Dibelius did not deny that some themes in the speech come originally from the Old Testament, such as the affirmation that God is the creator of the world or that he does not live in temples. But he argued that those themes have been hellenized. For example, the speech uses the terminology of *cosmos* rather than the terminology of 'heaven and earth' as does the Old Testament. Likewise, the *via negationis* way of talking about God, such as the assertion that he does not need anything, although it came to be used in Hellenistic Judaism and early Christianity, originates from Greek philosophy rather than from the Old Testament. Dibelius also saw verse v. 28 as affirming a panentheistic worldview and thus depicting humanity's relationship with God in a way which totally departs from the Old Testament.[26]

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[22]Norden 1913:29.

[23]Norden's thesis that Acts 17 was inserted in Acts by a second-century writer who composed it based on a speech from Apollonius of Tyana failed to convince exegetes. See especially Harnack's refutation (1913).

[24]Dibelius 1956:26-77.

[25]Dibelius 1939:34.

[26]Dibelius 1939:52. For Dibelius, what the speech affirms at this point has nothing to do with the OT idea that humanity is created in God's image.

Importantly then, for Dibelius, it is 'not only subsidiary motifs' which are derived from Stoicism in the speech, but its main idea, which is that knowledge of God can be attained through nature and humanity's inner knowledge of God. He thus concluded that 'the Areopagus speech is a Hellenistic speech with a Christian ending.'[27] This led the German scholar to the strange and now famous conclusion that the speech is 'a foreign body' not only in Acts but in the whole New Testament. For stylistic reasons, however, Dibelius nonetheless believed that the speech is the composition of the author of Acts who thus pens a paradigmatic sermon on how one should preach to the Gentiles around 90 CE.

Following Dibelius, several scholars continued to interpret the speech in Acts 17 as essentially describing a philosophical argument about the knowledge of God, although they sometimes challenged his interpretation of parts of the speech.[28] Most influentially, Max Pohlenz, who argued that the speech has strong similarities with the teachings of the Stoic Posidonius (c. 135 BCE – c. 51 BCE), presented several modifications to Dibelius' interpretation but concurred with him that the subject of the speech is 'eine heidnische Theorie der natürlichen Gotteserkenntnis.'[29] For him, the Christian speech simply overtakes this Stoic doctrine as an attempt to seek common ground with his Gentile audience, as its mention of the verse from Aratus in v. 28 demonstrates.[30]

In the decades which followed, Dibelius and Pohlenz were regularly criticized for underestimating the importance of the Old Testament background of the speech.[31] Furthermore, later scholars confirmed that the 'Greek' or 'Stoic' ideas identified in the speech were already present in Hellenistic Jewish sources and apologetic, thereby suggesting a different context than Stoicism for their origin and their interpretation. With the move of scholarship away from source to redaction and narrative criticism, several exegetes also criticized this interpretation for reading the speech's argument within a Stoic framework and not within the new framework suggested by the speech and its context.[32] In particular, this interpretation overlooks the new framework of the speech created by the anti-idol polemic and its Christological climax.

Despite this criticism, some commentators still claim that Paul's speech is 'a reflection on Stoic theology'[33] or that the general 'intellectual background of the speech' is Stoic.[34] Furthermore, in

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[27]Dibelius 1939:57-58.

[28]Pohlenz 1949, Vielhauer 1950-1951, Eltester 1957, Hommel 1955.

[29]Pohlenz 1949:95.

[30]Pohlenz 1949:89-90. Note that Pohlenz points out that the speech uses Stoic teaching to teach the *Christian* God and not the Stoic one. The speech thus reinterprets Aratus theistically.

[31]See 1.2.3 and 1.2.4 below.

[32]E.g., Dupont 1984:414.

[33]Walaskay 1998:166.

[34]Pervo 2009:430.

recent years, a similar reading which takes better into account the polemical context of the speech has been advanced by David Balch. Balch argues that the speech presents a Posidonian Stoic argument over against contemporary Stoicism—represented by Dio Chrysostom (c. 40 – c. 120 CE) —which was characterized by a rapprochement with popular religion. He concludes that 'Luke-Acts guards the legitimate philosophical tradition against the Athenians who delight in novelties.'[35] This thesis, however, does not avoid all the criticisms mentioned earlier. In addition to these, it can also be pointed out that this interpretation does not explain why the Athenians perceived Paul to be propagating a 'new teaching' (v.19) if he was simply propounding Stoic doctrine, nor how the resurrection of a man who would judge the world would fit well with the attempt to 'guard the legitimate philosophical tradition.'

1.2.3.   A thoroughly Jewish speech: downplaying the importance of Greek material (Gärtner)

At the opposite of Dibelius' thesis, some exegetes have downplayed the importance of Greek elements in the speech, and interpreted the discourse as making an essentially Jewish argument.[36]

In 1955, Bertil Gärtner published a dissertation which, over against Dibelius and Pohlenz's interpretation, argued that the speech is to be interpreted against a Jewish and especially an Old Testament background. Gärtner contended that the adduced parallels with Stoic arguments and theology are deceiving because those arguments need to be examined in their contexts before they can be considered appropriate parallels. Methodologically then, Gärtner proceeded to analyse different themes of the speech—such as the knowledge of God from nature, the conception of God or the polemic against idolatry—in the Old Testament, Hellenistic Jewish literature and Stoic writings, paying particular attention to their function and context in the theology represented in each literature. He concluded that while some of those themes and corresponding terminology can be found in both Jewish and Stoic literature, they do not function in the same way in both. Most importantly, the reference to the knowledge of God available from nature functions in Jewish literature to criticize false worship and idolatry (e.g. Wis 13-15) and not to build arguments about the existence of God as in Stoicism. Likewise, knowledge of God from nature in the Areopagus speech is not used to prove the existence of God like in Stoic arguments as claimed by Dibelius, but to build an anti-idol polemic.[37]

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[35]Balch 1990:79.

[36]In a different manner, in her recent book on *Paul in Athens* (2014), Clare K. Rothschild also downplays the importance of Greek philosophy but argues that the speech is rather to be interpreted in light of the traditions associated with Epimenides. Rothschild's thesis is idiosyncratic in scholarship and will not be discussed here. For a brief assessment, see my review (2016).

[37]Gärtner 1955:169.

For Gärtner then, the matrix out of which the speech comes is clearly the Old Testament and Judaism more generally. Without denying that the speech contains philosophical terminology, nor that it displays a rapprochement with philosophical ideas which is otherwise not found in the New Testament,[38] Gärtner emphasizes the necessity to distinguish between the '*assimilation* between Christian and Gentile-philosophical doctrines' and 'a clear-headed *adaptation* to the listeners' phraseology that does not overshadow the specifically Jewish-Christian content.'[39] For Gärtner the speech in Athens clearly falls in the second category, an interpretation which he saw as confirmed by the Athenians' perception of Paul as a *spermologos*, which shows that they perceived him to be some kind of 'eclectic.'[40] The convergence of the argument with Greek philosophy is thus very limited and can be explained by the preaching style of diaspora Judaism.

Gärtner's contribution, with the article of Wolfgang Nauck discussed in the next section, played an important role in highlighting the importance of the Old Testament and Jewish background of the speech, and in challenging Dibelius' interpretation. He was, however, frequently criticized for underestimating the importance of the 'Greek' elements of the speech and his attempt to trace almost the entirety of the speech to a Jewish-biblical background failed to convince many exegetes.[41]

More importantly for our purposes, and although this has not often been pointed out, Gärtner examines the way those motifs are used in two traditions—the Old Testament/Jewish and Stoic—and does not consider the possibility that the speech could be doing something totally different and new with them in a Christian speech. Methodologically, it is not so much the *origin* of the different motifs and ideas of the speech which is key here to interpret it, but how the discourse *as it stands in Acts 17* compares to the teachings of Hellenistic philosophy at this time.[42] In this light, and from a narratival perspective, Gärtner's interpretation of the Greek material as reflecting a purely 'formal' or terminological adaptation does not take enough into account the fact that the final form of the speech *does* sound strangely similar to some of the things said by Hellenistic philosophers and that in the narrative it is addressed *to an audience at least partly made of Hellenistic philosophers.* Not only so, but the speech itself appeals to the poets of the audience, thereby seeking some kind of common ground at least explicitly at one point. Consequently, interpretations of the speech which—like Gärtner's—seek to explain its elements by appealing to a Jewish or Christian framework which would have been unknown to the audience of the speech depicted by the author all create tensions for the narrative realism of the pericope.

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[38]Gärtner 1955:71.

[39]Gärtner 1955:72 (my emphasis).

[40]Gärtner 1955:72.

[41]See, however, Stenschke (1999:203-224) who interprets the speech almost with no reference to the Greek material.

[42]Pervo 2009:430, n.51, mentions this problem.

1.2.4.   The mixed nature of the speech and Hellenistic Jewish preaching (Nauck)

In his long article published in 1956, Wolfgang Nauck moved back to tradition and form criticism, and argued that both the content and the structure of the speech can be explained against the tradition of Hellenistic Jewish preaching.[43] His publication defended three major points.

First, criticizing Dibelius for going too far in attempting to explain some motifs against the background of Greek philosophy, Nauck argued that the speech is mixed and shows a very close connection between Old Testament and Greek motifs. Furthermore, the speech hellenizes Old Testament teaching, sometimes to the point that this teaching has been reinterpreted within a Greek framework. Thus, in v. 28 the Old Testament motif of the creation of humanity in God's image has been reinterpreted along the lines of the Greek motif of the divine kinship of humanity. For Nauck, Luke is not the author of this convergence and hellenization of motifs, but he inherited it from Hellenistic Judaism.[44]

Furthermore, Nauck argued that the Areopagus speech is structured along the schema of 'creation, conservation and salvation' (*Schöpfung—Erhaltung—Heil*), and claimed that this model can be found in the missionary practice of Hellenistic Judaism.[45] For him, the presence of this schema taken over from Hellenistic Judaism excludes the validity of Dibelius' proposal about the subject of the speech being Stoic theology, for it shows that the framework of the speech is Jewish, as Norden had claimed.[46] It also shows that the Stoic motifs of the speech probably came to Luke through the intermediary of Hellenistic Judaism, rather than through a reflection on Stoic philosophy directly.

Finally, Nauck argued that there were different theological currents in Hellenistic Judaism, some of them being very critical of paganism (e.g. Sibylline oracles), while others were more conciliatory (e.g. Aristobulus). For Nauck, Paul, in Romans 1, follows the first current, while Luke, in the Areopagus speech, follows the latter. The Areopagus speech thus differs from many anti-Jewish polemics not only in tone, but also in theology, by showing more willingness to connect to Gentile knowledge about God and a more positive view on the possibility of knowing God among the gentiles.[47]

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[43]Nauck mentions that he finished his article before seeing Gärtner's publication.

[44]Nauck 1956:122-23.

[45]Nauck 1956: 31. For a similar kind of argument, cf. Lebram 1964.

[46]Nauck 1956:33.

[47]While Nauck criticizes Dibelius' thesis that the speech is a reflection on Stoic theology then, his interpretation of the argument of the speech remains very close to Dibelius', whom he frequently cites. For him, the speech is mild polemic and the Gentiles' worship is not singled out as darkness and total error. On the contrary, natural revelation has led them 'zum ahnenden "Begreifen" und Verehren Gottes' (Dibelius 56 f.; Nauck 43). As for the repentance called for, as Dibelius had argued, 'sie besteht letzlich in der Besinnung auf jene Gotteserkenntnis, die dem Menschen von Natur eigen ist' (Dibelius 55; quoted in Nauck 34).

Nauck's article played an important role in the history of interpretation of this pericope. After his publication, most exegetes accepted the mixed character of the speech, and criticized Dibelius for having underestimated the Old Testament and Jewish background of several motifs of the speech and Gärtner for not taking its Hellenistic material enough into account.[48] Consequently, most scholars moved away from attempts to explain the totality of the speech against a single interpretative background as Dibelius and Gärtner had done. Instead, continuing to try to trace the background of the different motifs of the speech, they debated the way those different backgrounds and this different material relate to each other. This sometimes took the form of trying to determine whether the Stoic or the Jewish background is dominant. In this respect, many scholars concurred with Norden and Nauck's conclusion of a Jewish *Grundmotiv* and a Stoic *Begleitmotiv*.[49]

Another development since Nauck's article is that exegetes now usually trace the background or origin of the 'Greek' material of the speech to Hellenistic Judaism and not directly to Stoic philosophy.[50] While this had already been suggested or assumed by Norden and Gärtner, it became a consensus after Nauck's publication.

What has convinced exegetes less in the long run is Nauck's attempt to explain the succession of motifs of the speech by the existence of a traditional scheme in Jewish missionary preaching. Either they have questioned the existence of such a scheme in Jewish preaching,[51] or the assessment that the speech in Acts 17 follows such a scheme,[52] or they have drawn attention to the author's role in shaping the speech as a literary creation. This last element became more and more important in the latter part of the 20th century and influenced the way scholars approached the examination of the function of the Greek material in the speech. The next few sections discusses some of the ways they have understood this material to relate to the speech.

1.2.5. A Christian speech: reinterpreting Greek philosophy within a Christian Framework (Conzelmann)

Several exegetes could be examined under this category.[53] According to these scholars the Stoic or Greek motifs—already present in Hellenistic Judaism—are used in the service of the Christian message of the speech, and especially to proclaim Christian or Jewish monotheism. For several interpreters, this also means that the Greek motifs are given a new meaning within their Christian framework. Most obviously, the pantheism implicit in Stoicism, and implied by the quotation from

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[48]For the mixed nature of the discourse, e.g., Dupont 1984:403; Fitzmyer 1998:603; Marguerat 2015:152.

[49]Schneider 1982:235; Conzelmann 1987:147.

[50]E.g., Balch 1990:53; Pervo 2009:430; Dunn 1992:230.

[51]Conzelmann 1966:226.

[52]Conzelmann 1966:226; Conzelmann 1987:148.

[53]E.g. Conzelmann 1966; Haenchen 1971; Dupont 1984.

Aratus, is interpreted in a theistic way. What happens in the speech is thus a kind of '*interpretatio christiana*' of the philosophical material, and this sometimes implies a modification of the meaning which it had in its original context.[54] To do so, the speech exploits 'points of contact' or 'points of congruence' between Greek philosophy and the Christian message. The congruence exploited, however, is limited to the first article of the creed, namely the doctrine of God.[55]

Thus, in his 1966 article Conzelmann concurs that the speech uses both OT and Greek motifs and that sometimes the speech capitalizes on the convergence of both traditions. Commenting on v. 28, the exegete argues that its pantheism refers to an idea which is not found in the New Testament at all and which is incompatible with the idea of creation. He suggests, however, that the author is unaware of the original meaning of Aratus' quotation and, like Aristobulus before him, has reinterpreted it to use it for 'the sake of the belief in the biblical story of creation.'[56]

Furthermore, in his conclusion Conzelmann draws attention to the role of the author in shaping the speech and the new Christian framework in which the different motifs appear. Asking how the different elements of the speech, including its Christian conclusion, are related to each other, Conzelmann is unconvinced by Nauck's proposal that there exists a scheme of *creatio-conservatio-salvatio* in Jewish literature.[57] Furthermore, for him the analogy with such a pattern breaks at the crucial point of the Areopagus speech which focuses on anthropology—namely man's proximity with God and his kinship with him. Rather, the structure of the speech is Luke's literary product and reflects his particular concern. It is constructed on the Christian confession of faith: 'one God, one Lord.' Conzelmann explains this structure by the context at hand: whereas to a Jewish audience it is sufficient to present Jesus since belief in one God is assumed, in a polytheistic context, the first article of faith needs to be affirmed. At the same time, this tripartite division also reflects Luke's concern in his work with the three parts of history, Jesus' resurrection inaugurating a new stage.

Conzelmann's explanation of the structure of the speech as the reflection of a Christian confession of faith and Luke's specific concerns had an important consequence on his assessment of the meaning of the Stoic and Jewish motifs in the speech. Indeed, the placement of those motifs within the 'framework of a given pattern of belief' has the result that those motifs' meaning undergoes a change and is now to be understood within Luke's Christian framework.

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[54]The phrase '*interpretatio christiana*' is from Haenchen 1971:529. For Haenchen this type of reinterpretation already took place in Hellenistic Judaism and was borrowed by early Christian authors. Although their interpretation of the speech differs on several points, Haenchen, Conzelmann and Dupont all suggests that such a reinterpretation takes place.

[55]Haenchen 1971:530.

[56]Conzelmann 1966:224, cf. 225.

[57]In his 1987 commentary, however, Conzelmann concedes that such a schema can be discerned in the Prayer of Manasseh (1987:148).

By the literary application of current motifs within the framework of a given pattern of belief, the meaning of the various motifs themselves undergoes a change. Accessibility of the world in the philosophical gnostic sense is replaced by access to the relation with God through μετάνοια (repentance), knowledge of God in the sense of πίστις (faith). Luke evidently is fully aware of this change. We cannot miss the conscious harshness with which he stresses the strangeness of the doctrine of the resurrection at the end.[58]

Thus, for Conzelmann, not only does Luke not share the Stoic view of history, but, although he takes over some elements of the view of history expressed in Jewish apocalyptic, he also simplifies the division of history into three periods. Thus, Jesus' resurrection 'introduces a historical epoch fundamentally new compared with the former one' and in which salvation through repentance is proclaimed and required to avoid perdition.[59]

Conzelmann is representative of exegetes who underscore the particular Lukan new framework of the speech whose combination of motifs—independent of their origin—is used to serve the author's purpose. He thus notes not only important discontinuity with Stoic philosophy but also with Judaism. As he expresses in his 1987 commentary, this means that the speech cannot be understood simply through comparative material.

We must also take note of the reduction which has occurred in the literary setting where these motifs now appear. The Stoic motifs, in other words, cannot be interpreted without some attention to the singular framework into which they have been inserted […][60]

For Conzelmann, the 'Stoic' motifs are used for establishing points of contact with the audience in a missionary endeavour.

It is clear that Luke enlists the service of philosophy in establishing a point of contact between the missionary message and the non-Christian world; it is also apparent that he goes considerably further than Paul in establishing the connection.[61]

Conzelmann thus advocates a reinterpretation of the 'Stoic' motifs along Christian lines in the speech, but still claims that the speech seeks common ground with the audience.

Conzelmann's insistence on the new 'Christian framework' of the speech to interpret its motifs is a crucial development in the assessment of the meaning of the 'Greek' elements of the speech and the relationship of the discourse with Hellenistic philosophy. The question Conzelmann fails to ask, however, is whether such a radical reinterpretation of 'Stoic' motifs would still have been perceived

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[58]Conzelmann 1966:228.

[59]Conzelmann 1966:228-229.

[60]Conzelmann 1987:148.

[61]Conzelmann 1987:148.

as a search for common ground *by a Stoic audience*. This is the crucial question which is raised by Rowe's recent publications (cf. 1.2.8).

1.2.6.   *Anknüpfung und Widerspruch*: philosophy as criticism of Graeco-Roman religion

Several scholars have emphasized that the connections the speech makes with Greek philosophy are at least partly used to *criticize* the Athenians' religiosity.[62] In particular the three main sentences of the speech—that God does not live in temples made by human hands, that he is not served by human hands, and that he is not similar to gold, silver and stone—are all negative and critical, and parallels to those assertions can be found in Hellenistic philosophy. For some scholars, then, one of the obvious functions of Graeco-Roman philosophy is to criticize Athenian religion. They have, however, drawn different conclusions on the speech's attitude towards *Hellenistic philosophers*.

Thus, some exegetes have argued that the speech's criticism is directed against Athenian religion rather than against the philosophers.[63] The speech uses Greek philosophy as an ally to criticize and denounce pagan religion. For example, Haenchen writes:

> What the speech attacks, with arguments from the philosophy of the Greek enlightenment, is the heathen popular belief and not the religion of the philosophers. If the speech is nonetheless directed to these philosophers, it is because Greek culture is to be exhibited in its highest representatives.[64]

As Haenchen's comment shows, one tension created by this reading is that the narrative seems to suggest that the speech is addressed to philosophers, or at least to an audience containing philosophers. For Haenchen, however, this is not an issue because Luke has not composed a 'real' but an 'ideal' account.

Other exegetes, however, have interpreted this as a sign that Luke uses Hellenistic philosophy not only against Athenian religion, but also to some degree against Hellenistic philosophers themselves. For Barrett, for example, the speech uses elements of Epicurean philosophy against Athenian religion, and then Stoics elements against the Epicureans, even though in the end both philosophical systems are condemned:

> Paul enlists the aid of the philosophers, using in the first place the rational criticism of the Epicureans to attack the folly and especially the idolatry of popular religion, and then the theism of the Stoics to establish (against the Epicureans) the immediate and intimate nearness

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[62]E.g. Haenchen 1971; Barrett 1974; Schneider 1982; Jipp 2012. The phrase "Anknüpfung und Widerspruch" is the title of one of Bultmann's well-known essays (1946), where he discusses the connection (*Anknüpfung*) the New Testament makes with the natural theology of the Stoa, mystery religions and the gnosis.

[63]Schneider 1982:235.

[64]Haenchen 1971:528. Cf. 525.

of God, and man's obligation to follow the path of duty and of (true) religion, rather than that of pleasure. But all these propaedeutics come in the end under judgment: men must repent, for God has appointed a day in which he means to judge the world in righteousness, by a Man whom he has appointed, and raised from the dead (17:31).[65]

Differently, Jipp and Balch interpret the use of philosophy as a criticism of Athenian religion which includes the philosophers because they often continued to engage in traditional cultic practices themselves. The criticism therefore serves to ironically highlight and denounce the philosophers because they failed to hold consistently to their own teaching (Jipp) or to the teachings of a more 'orthodox' form of Stoicism (Balch).[66]

This later interpretation fits better the narrative setting of the pericope, which suggests that the speech's audience includes philosophers. It also makes better sense of the call to repentance in v. 30, which is addressed to *all*, and thus would have included the philosophers. Finally, this interpretation is also attractive because denouncing the self-contradiction and inconsistencies of one's opponent was a very common rhetorical and philosophical practice in the ancient world.[67]

There are, however, two problems with this analysis of the Greek material. First, the reactions of the philosophers, both before the speech and at the end of it, do not seem to corroborate the hypothesis that Paul was using philosophical arguments against the philosophers. Rather, their first perception of him is that he is a *spermologos*, 'a proclaimer of foreign divinities,' and a teacher of 'a new doctrine' (vv. 18-19), and most react to the speech with laughter or loss of interest. This suggests that the philosophers did not understand the speech to be making mainly—or at least powerfully—such an accusation of self-contradiction.

More importantly, however, this interpretation fails to take into account that both Stoic and Epicurean philosophers advanced philosophical reasons not only for tolerating some traditional religious practices but sometimes even for encouraging them. They could thus claim that the divinity does not live in temples, that it is not served by human hands and that idols themselves are not gods, and yet find good reasons for expressing piety *at least partly* along those ways.[68] From the perspective of narrative realism then, it is questionable that the kind of arguments advanced by the speech would have confounded the Stoics or the Epicureans of inconsistency because they still engaged in some traditional cultic practices.

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[65]Barrett 1974:75.

[66]Jipp 2012; Balch 1990.

[67]This is well illustrated by Plutarch's anti-Stoic and anti-Epicurean polemical works, several of which bear a title evocative of this strategy (e.g. *On stoic Self-contradictions*). On the importance of living according to one's doctrine as a philosopher, cf. Plutarch, *Stoic. rep.* 1033AB.

[68]This is discussed in chapter 4.

1.2.7. The search for 'common ground' and 'points of contact' in the service of apologetic

Many scholars speak of the speech in Athens as an attempt to seek 'common ground' or 'points of contact' with the philosophers or the audience, mainly for apologetic and communicative purposes.[69] For example, for Dunn the speech starts as an 'apology for the Jewish understanding of God' which builds on points of contact with Greek philosophy, a practice which is in continuity with the methodology of Hellenistic Jewish apologetic.[70]

> The language used builds as much as possible on contacts with the wider philosophies of the time (particularly Stoicism) but is basically Jewish monotheism and creation theology presented in its universal implications.[71]

In addition, some of those scholars emphasize that while the speech contains affirmations which show continuity with Stoicism, it also makes assertions which are in direct contradictions with it and thus discontinuous. Barrett writes:

> The human race *is* one, it *was* made for a special relation with God, and it *is* man's business to discern this relation and to live in accordance with it. So far the Stoics are right, and they can be used against Athenian scepticism, atheism, and flippancy. They know that life is real and earnest, and that men must feel after God. But they worship God in ignorance, and what lies ahead of the human race is not (as they think) an ἐκπύρωσις and a new beginning of the age-old cycle, but the judgment of the world through Jesus Christ.[72]

Likewise, in his article Schnabel analyses the Stoic and Epicurean doctrines about God, providence and judgment and outlines continuities and discontinuities with Luke's teaching in the speech.[73]

A little different, but still advocating an apologetic reading of the speech are Marguerat and Jipp's proposals, who argue that the speech is consciously built to echo both Jewish and Greek traditions. For Marguerat, Luke thus creates an 'apologetic masterpiece' and presents Christianity not only as the fulfilment of the promises of Scriptures but also as the 'fulfilment' of the religious aspirations of the Graeco-Roman world.[74] He thereby seeks to integrate the best elements of Jewish tradition and Graeco-Roman culture within Christianity.[75] At the same time, the author also aims to

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[69]Barrett 1974, 1998; Dunn 1996; Schnabel 2005; Jipp 2012; Marguerat 2004, 2015.

[70]Dunn 1996:236.

[71]Dunn 1996:230.

[72]Barrett 1974:73-74. In his commentary he notes that Luke restricts 'the use of philosophy to those themes which it shares with the OT.' (2004:826).

[73]Schnabel 2005.

[74]Marguerat 2004:76.

[75]Marguerat 2015:152-153.

demonstrate the intellectual respectability of the Christian message, by showing that the knowledge and argumentation of its spokesman stands up to a comparison with Hellenistic philosophers.[76]

For Jipp, the echoes which resonate with both Jewish and Greek traditions in the speech serve both to criticize Gentile religion and to 'exalt the Christian movement as comprising the best features of Greco-Roman philosophical sensibilities and therefore as a superior philosophy.'[77] In particular, like the philosophers, the speech rejects the veneration of images as 'superstition,' and demonstrates, by its argumentation, that Christianity is no 'crass superstition.'[78] Not only so, but because the philosophers usually still engaged in cultic practices even though they often criticized them, Luke demonstrates that 'the Christian movement embodies the philosophically elite's ideals better and more consistently than do the Athenians.'[79] The speech thus serves both as criticism and as 'a form of legitimation or propaganda' of Christianity.[80]

Despite its popularity, this interpretation of the Greek material is more problematic than is recognized. Key to the assessment of those proposals is what exegetes mean by 'apologetic' and how they envisage the 'apologetic audience' of the speech.[81] Unfortunately, scholars rarely clarify such elements in their discussion. But if this apologetic discourse is addressed to an audience of outsiders, as Jipp's use of the word 'propaganda' seems to suggest, then this reading appears rather problematic.

Indeed, while a modern scholar might be tempted to consider that Paul's philosophical allusions are the 'best aspects' of Graeco-Roman culture or even of Hellenistic philosophical teaching about the divine, it is far from evident that the philosophers, the Athenians, or any outsider generally, would have shared this assessment. In fact, some commentators have pointed out that much in the speech is simply philosophical common place. If this is the case, then it is unlikely to have embodied the 'philosophical ideals' of the elite. More importantly, if the use of Greek philosophy serves such an 'apologetic' purpose of convincing outsiders, then why does the speech end with the shocking proclamation of a coming judgment by a man risen from the dead without smoothing this claim by making the resurrection more palatable or convincing to the audience? In fact, the reaction of the Greek audience with laughter and loss of interest, which exegetes usually assess to be a very realistic description of what would have happened if such a speech was given to a Greek audience, strongly weakens the proposal that Greek philosophy in the speech serves apologetic purposes. If Luke's aim

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[76]Marguerat 2015:167.

[77]Jipp 2012:568.

[78]Jipp 2012:581.

[79]Jipp 2012:576.

[80]Jipp 2012:588.

[81]For an excellent discussion of the issues with the use of this term with respect to Acts, see Alexander 1999.

was to present a 'respectable' Christianity to outsiders, he certainly failed in the narrative world he is portraying!

A more convincing interpretation is that the speech serves an apologetic function for insiders, and that Luke seeks to show to his Christians readers that their 'religion' also embodies the best of Graeco-Roman philosophy or is the fulfilment of it. Through the speech, Luke thus contributes to building or solidifying Christianity's self-definition, or its 'internal' legitimization.[82] A weakness of this proposal, however, is that in light of its lack of convincing power towards outsiders, one might wonder how useful such an 'apologetic' would have been for insiders. At best, it might have comforted Christians that they shared *some teachings* about the divine with some venerable philosophical traditions of the Graeco-Roman world, and, for example, that it was also opposed to *deisidaimonia*.

1.2.8. Christianity and Greek philosophy as rival traditions (Rowe)

Like some of the interpreters examined earlier, Rowe also represents an exegete who does not deny philosophical echoes in the speech, but downplays their significance.[83] However, unlike previous exegetes who do so because those echoes are included within a Jewish anti-idol polemic or because they are limited to points of convergence with Jewish material, Rowe argues from the *nature* of ancient philosophy.

Thus, in his article published in 2010, Rowe challenged the interpretation that the Areopagus speech represents an attempt at theological rapprochement (*Anknüpfungspunkt*) between Christianity and Greek philosophy by proposing that it describes a fundamentally different grammar for the whole of life which conflicts with pagan tradition. For Rowe, the elements of the speech which have usually been identified as Greek philosophical concepts and terms cannot be interpreted as an attempt to *translate* the Christian message with Greek philosophical language and thus a rapprochement with Greek philosophy, because those terms do not have a Stoic or Greek philosophical meaning in the Christian framework of the speech. By incorporating this philosophical material into the speech, the speech gives it a new meaning. In other words, Paul does not seek a common ground with Greek philosophy, but *redefines*—and thereby *transforms*—the meaning of Greek philosophical words and concepts by using them within a new Christian hermeneutical framework. As a consequence, what might appear as a Stoic concept needs to be understood with a Christian meaning because Paul is mentioning it in the framework of Christian history, as his allusion to Adam, Jesus and judgment

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[82]That the book of Acts aimed to build Christian self-identity has become a common assertion in scholarship. Cf. especially Sterling 1992.

[83]Rowe 2011 and Rowe 2009:27-41.

show. Thus, Rowe speaks of *collision, appropriation* and *transformation* to describe the encounter between the Christian and the philosophical way of life.

> What is at stake in the appropriation and transformation of pagan tradition is not a simple difference in theoretical viewpoint but the difference in the total configuration of life that emerges out of conflicting claims to truth about the ultimate origin and destiny of humanity.[84]

The message presented by the speech in Athens is thus fundamentally in conflict with Greek philosophical teaching. Rowe's article was, as noted above, an extension of his treatment of the Areopagus speech in his book *World Upside Down* (OUP 2009), where he defends the thesis that the book of Acts depicts the early Christian movement as subversive of Graeco-Roman culture.

As the present overview of past scholarship on the Areopagus speech highlights, Rowe's claim that past interpretations have generally understood the speech as an act of *translation* of the Christian message into Stoic categories or terminology lacks nuancing.[85] In fact, few interpreters use the language of 'translation,' and many speak rather of a 'Christian *interpretation*' or '*re*-interpretation' of the pagan philosophical material which is necessitated by the new framework created by the speech.[86] Rowe's article thus overlooks the extent to which several past interpreters have already emphasized the element of transformation of the Greek material in the speech, and the reading of the speech he advocates is thus not as different from several past interpretations as he suggests.[87]

What is new and crucial in Rowe's contribution, however, is the consequence he draws from this, namely his assertion that the speech cannot reflect an attempt of *rapprochement* with the Greek audience *in light of the nature of Greek philosophy.* Admittedly, his claim that past scholarship has usually interpreted the speech as 'an attempt at theological rapprochement' would again have benefited from more nuancing.[88] Indeed, as the present overview has also demonstrated, there are important differences among past interpretations and exegetes have disagreed both on the *extent* of this rapprochement—whether it is purely terminological, or extends to some theology—and especially on its *purpose*—whether it is a rapprochement intended simply to enable communication, to criticize, to build an apologetic, or really to transmit a doctrine of God. Rowe's assessment is correct, however, in the sense that when exegetes have attempted to explain *the cause or the purpose of the hellenization of the speech* and its use of Greek material in it (and not of the speech as a whole as

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[84]Rowe 2011:46.

[85]In his conclusion, Rowe speaks of the 'long tradition of reading Paul's Areopagus speech as a "translation" of Christian theological convictions into pagan philosophical terms' (Rowe 2011:49).

[86]See 1.2.5 and especially Haenchen 1971; Conzelmann 1966; Barrett 1974.

[87]Exegetes like Conzelmann, Barrett or Schnabel all show an awareness of the reinterpretation which takes place in the interpretative framework of the speech.

[88]Rowe 2011:31, 34.

Rowe suggests), they have indeed generally explained it as an attempt of rapprochement with the audience at hand.

It is this traditional interpretation which Rowe challenges by drawing attention to the *nature* of ancient philosophy as traditions and embedded ways of life which covered the totality of life. His latest book on Christianity and Stoicism—*One True Life* (Yale University Press, 2016)—picks up this thematic. In this publication, Rowe underscores that ancient Stoicism was a complex tradition with a vision of life which was ultimately incompatible and incommensurable with the *Weltanschauung* and the practical life advocated by Christianity. As Rowe rightly emphasizes both in his article on the Areopagus speech and in this book, what is crucial to measure is how the speech and Stoicism are related to each other is their *grammar*, and not just conceptual or terminological similarity.[89]

What Rowe's assertion implies is that true theological rapprochement between the speech in Athens and Greek philosophy could hardly have happened simply by adducing a common terminology or even common concepts. As he writes:

> In the deepest sense, readers of Acts who advocate for translation as the interpretive lens through which to see Paul's speech either fail to take ancient philosophy seriously as philosophy or unwittingly mistake bits and pieces of verbal or conceptual overlap for a pattern of life—or, alas, do both at once.[90]

It is this larger point made by Rowe which is his crucial contribution to the debate at hand. *Contra* Rowe, it must be emphasized that some past exegetes *have* shown awareness that Stoicism and Christianity are different and even incompatible 'philosophical systems,'[91] but no one, to my knowledge, has ever thoroughly drawn the consequences of this state of affairs, namely the fact that this implies that bits and pieces of verbal and conceptual overlap *were unlikely to have been understood as a theological rapprochement or even a rapprochement of any kind* by a philosophical or a Christian audience. Rowe's studies, however, pointedly raise this issue.

Rowe's interpretation has the advantage of fitting with the narrative context of the speech in which the philosophers' assessment of Paul suggest that he is exposing a 'new teaching,' and of taking into account seriously the nature of ancient philosophy in which meaning lay in the *grammar* of the teaching rather than in the use of specific terminology or concepts. At the same time, however, Rowe's exegesis of Acts 17 remains problematic for two reasons. First, Rowe does not provide a

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[89]This remark does not represent an endorsement without reserve of Rowe's arguments in his latest book. For a discussion of some of the problems with his thesis, see, for example, Jipp's review (2017).

[90]Rowe 2011:49.

[91]See especially those who underscore the continuity but also discontinuity of the speech with Stoicism, but also those who underscores that a reinterpretation is taking place in it.

convincing alternative explanation for *the abundance* of 'Greek' sounding material in this speech.[92] For Rowe, Paul's use of this material reflects his precarious situation on trial and serves to refute the charge of newness, while also being part of his effort to communicate with pagans with words they understand.[93] Those suggestions, however, do not account well for the degree of hellenization of the speech, nor for the fact that Luke's Paul does indeed seem to seek some kind of common ground with the philosophical background of his audience when he cites Aratus.

In addition, like several other interpretations, Rowe's exegesis raises issues for the verisimilitude of the narrative world of the pericope. Rowe is emphatic that *Luke*'s audience – i.e. his readers – would understand that the 'one' referred to in v. 26 is Adam and the man risen from the dead is 'Jesus.' But it is unlikely that the Athenians in the narrative world of Acts would have been able to make such links, or indeed grasp the Christian interpretation of the speech suggested by Rowe. Like exegetes who interpret the speech purely against a Jewish background, Rowe proposes an interpretation of the speech which might well have been accessible to the Christian reader of Acts, but not to the Athenians in his narrative. If then Luke is concerned to create a plausible story in which Paul seeks to communicate effectively with his audience, Rowe's interpretation remains problematic.

1.2.9. Conclusion: Making sense of the hellenization of the speech and its 'Christian' conclusion

As this overview has highlighted, although all exegetes agree that the Areopagus speech is hellenized, they have disagreed both on the extent of this hellenization and what this means both in terms of the relationship of the speech with Greek philosophy and the interpretation of the speech itself. Most importantly, past approaches to the speech have struggled to provide an interpretation of the discourse which accounts both for its apparent attempt to seek common ground and communicate with the audience, and its unambiguous denunciation of Athenian religiosity as ignorance and proclamation of a shockingly new Christian message at the end of the speech. Indeed, the extent of the problem with current approaches is well illustrated by their failure to explain how a speech which seems so concerned with proper communication and seeking common ground with its audience suddenly announces a coming divine judgment by a man risen from the dead.[94] The speech's careful cross-cultural approach thus concludes with the sudden proclamation of events which would have been shocking—if understandable at all—by a Greek audience. As Dunn comments:

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[92]Jipp (2012:568, n. 3) rightly makes this remark and suggests that Rowe has not sufficiently 'explained *why and for what reason* Paul's speech utilizes pagan traditions to the extent that it does.'

[93]Rowe 2011:41-42.

[94]The 'remarkable adjustment to the environment' of the speech in Athens (Mason 2012:165) is generally accepted by exegetes.

But such a hopelessly brief allusion to the distinctive Christian claims regarding judgment and resurrection would have been bound to meet with incomprehension and dismissal, and a lengthier exposition would have demanded too great a leap in basic assumptions and conceptuality for most.[95]

F. C. Baur had already well perceived the problem. Pointing out that the speech seeks common ground with his audience and shows admirable wisdom in teaching, he asks how such a gifted teacher could possibly 'drop' a teaching as offensive as the resurrection the way the speech does.

> This speech is commonly praised as a model of the Apostle's apologetic method, and of his wisdom as a teacher. But has it been also considered that these merits ought to appear in recommending the chief idea which the speaker was anxious to enforce? […] The speaker appeals, in support of one of the principal ideas of the speech, to the words of a Greek poet, thus showing how much he wished to find a common ground between himself and his hearers for mutual approximation. […] Up to this point the speech proceeded as well as possible; and the result it aimed at was all but won, when, by a word dropped incautiously by the speaker, all was changed and he was cut short, it appears in the middle of the sentence he had begun.[96]

For Baur, this total lack of tact in introducing a teaching as 'offensive' as the resurrection clearly shows that the apostle could not possibly have delivered such as speech.

The conclusion of the speech, and its connection with the rest of the speech which has been so carefully hellenized, has thus long been a key interpretative problem in the study of the Areopagus speech. In fact, the logic of the speech as a whole has remained a puzzle. Some older scholars explained the enchainment of motifs and its strange climax by arguing that it reflects the typical structure of a mission speech.[97] A more common explanation has been that the speech is not fully reported or that it is intended as a summary of a much longer and detailed exposition.[98] Pervo, however, comments: '[a] cultured Greek would dismiss these brief words as a stylistically inadequate and muddled collection of clichés with an unexpected and improbable conclusion'.[99]

Building on Rowe's latest challenge and insight about the nature of ancient philosophy, however, the present project suggests a new approach to the Areopagus speech which sheds light on the logic of its argument and, above all, on its Christological conclusion.

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[95]Dunn 1996:238.

[96]Baur 1876:175-176.

[97]Nauck 1956.

[98]E.g. Dunn 1996:231.

[99]Pervo 2008:430.

1.3. A new approach to the Areopagus speech

The present project suggests that an approach which takes into account recent research on hellenization, Luke's concern for verisimilitude and the nature of ancient philosophy sheds light on its argument and the meaning of its Christological conclusion.

1.3.1. Recent research on Hellenistic Judaism and hellenization

One of the surprising shortcomings of past interpretations of the speech in Athens, is their lack of methodological reflection on, and integration of, recent scholarship on 'hellenization' in diaspora and palestinian Judaism.[100] It is indeed very rare for exegetes of this pericope to address this question methodologically and to mention relevant scholarly literature on this subject. This has led to mistaken assumptions and premature conclusions about the way the hellenization of Acts 17 should be interpreted and led to problems of interpretation.

For example, past scholarship on Acts 17 has too often assumed that the hellenization – i.e. the adoption of Greek form, argumentation, terminology or sources – of the speech in Acts 17 implied a rapprochement with the Greek audience or Greek philosophy. But as studies of Jewish diaspora and post-colonial studies have shown, what is important to assess the attitude of a text towards Greek culture is not its degree of hellenization or use of Greek motifs, but *the use to which those motifs are put*. Indeed, a minority culture can use elements of the majority culture not only to integrate it, but also to resist and criticize it.[101] Despite this, while some studies of the Areopagus speech have argued that 'Greek philosophical ideas' in the speech are used to criticize Greek culture, there is still a tendency to interpret this at least as a partial endorsement of Greek philosophy or as a rapprochement with it. But this needs not to follow.

Furthermore, and even more fundamentally, despite the well-accepted fact since Nauck that the 'Greek' elements of the speech can also be found in diaspora Judaism, many scholars still focus on distinguishing between Jewish and Greek elements in the speech. But if, as studies on both diaspora Judaism in its Graeco-Roman environment and Judaism in the land of Israel have suggested, all or most of Judaism was more or less hellenized in the timeframe which concerns us, the question of the cultural origin of the motifs—a central preoccupation in much past scholarship on Acts 17—is both *difficult* and, most importantly, *irrelevant* to assess the attitude of the speech towards Greek

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[100]On hellenization in the Jewish diaspora, see for example Collins 2000 [1983]; Barclay 1996; Gruen 1998. On the hellenization of Judaism in the land of Israel, see above all Hengel's landmark study *Hellenism and Judaism* (1974 [1969]), whose main thesis has been largely corroborated by later studies (cf. for example, the collection of essays in Collins and Sterling 2001).

[101]Cf. Barclay 1996:98: 'acculturation could be used to construct either bridges or fences between Jews and their surrounding cultures.'

philosophy.[102] In a truly Hellenised cultural environment, the supposedly 'Greek' ideas and terminology of the speech are in fact no more Greek than Jewish.[103] In such a context, what we might today be tempted to classify as 'Greek' arguments were probably by the time which concerns us simply common ways of expression in a Hellenistic world, a world of which both Jewish and Christian communities were an integral part.[104] They were cultural elements which by that time were common to the whole Graeco-Roman region and the larger Hellenistic culture of which Jewish and Christian communities were an expression.

Admittedly, the speech in Athens is different from the speeches addressed to a Jewish audience in Acts and shows indeed a clear adaptation to its Greek audience. But that does not make the speech in Athens more 'Greek' than the other speeches. It only means that the speakers in Acts' narrative speak differently and use different arguments when speaking with different audiences. If the environment is thoroughly hellenized then, even the question of the 'use' of such motifs becomes irrelevant, since they cannot be identified as specifically 'Greek' motifs anymore.

In light of such considerations, the present project will not at all focus on determining the Greek or Jewish origin of the motifs or terminology used, nor will it attempt to identify in any systematic way parallels to its ideas in Greek or Jewish literature as is generally done in scholarship on this pericope. Rather, it will proceed from the presupposition that the environment was sufficiently hellenized to make such questions irrelevant. Instead, the speech will be examined as a *Christian* speech which is addressed to a Greek audience. This brings us to the next methodological presupposition of this project, namely that Luke is concerned with the verisimilitude of his account.

1.3.2. Verisimilitude in Acts

The most fundamental starting hypothesis of this project is that Luke has created a speech appropriate to its situation in Acts 17. There is widespread agreement in scholarship today that Luke's authorial hand stands behind the speeches in Acts.[105] There is also sufficient evidence that ancient historians

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[102]This point is also made by Aitken (2004:340) in his recent assessment of Hengel's contribution: '…the occasional drive to determine whether an idea is Jewish or 'Greek' becomes obsolete when it can be both at once.'

[103]On the problems of the divide Jewish/Hellenistic as analytical categories in the study of the Hellenistic world, see the collection of essays in Engberg-Pedersen (2001).

[104]So Gruen 1998:292: 'Jews remained true to ancestral traditions, the faith of their fathers, and the sanctity of the Scriptures. But they found themselves cheek by jowl with Hellenistic communities in Palestine, and they were part and parcel of Hellenistic societies in the Diaspora. The Jews were not as much permeated by the culture of the Greeks as they were an example of it. This made it all the more important to exhibit the features of their own legacy in the terms and language of their adopted one.'

[105]Scholars debate on whether and how Luke used sources for his narrative and his speeches, but not on the fact that his hand lies behind the speech in their actual form.

argued that good historiography needed to include speeches appropriate to the audience and situation at hand.[106] The passages from Thucydides and Lucian which articulate this 'historiographical rule' have now become famous:

> As to the speeches that were made by different men, either when they were about to begin the war or when they were already engaged therein, it has been difficult to recall with strict accuracy the words actually spoken, both for me as regards that which I myself heard, and for those who from various other sources have brought me reports. Therefore the speeches are given in the language in which, as it seemed to me (ὡς δ' ἂν ἐδόκουν μοι), the several speakers would express (τὰ δέοντα), on the subjects under consideration, the sentiments most befitting the occasion, though at the same time I have adhered as closely as possible to the general sense of what was actually said. (Thucydides 1.22.1 [LCL])

> If a person has to be introduced to make a speech, above all let his language suit his person and his subject (μάλιστα μὲν ἐοικότα τῷ προσώπῳ καὶ τῷ πράγματι οἰκεῖα λεγέσθω), and next let these also be as clear as possible. It is then, however, that you can play the orator and show your eloquence. (Lucian, *How to Write History* 58 [LCL]).

The importance of this rule is corroborated by Dionysius of Halicarnassus' criticism of Thucydides precisely because on several occasions the speeches in his history do not sit well with the situation he describes.[107] Clearly, plausibility and verisimilitude seem to have been, in theory at least, an important criterion in ancient historiography, even if Dionysius' criticism shows that historians did not always succeed in producing such speeches in the eyes of their critics. What has been debated in scholarship, is the extent to which ancient historians respected this practice, and whether Luke always composed speeches appropriate and relevant to their narrative context. Thus, Eckhard Plümacher followed Dibelius and argued that the speeches in Acts, like those in Graeco-Roman historiography, are loosely fitted to their context and sometimes even conflict with the surrounding material.[108] For both exegetes, the Areopagus speech in Acts 17 was a case in point. Marion Soards, however, challenged this view and contended that the speeches in Hellenistic historiography, while they 'may be vague and unnecessarily lengthy,' nonetheless 'sill speak *around* the central concern that led to the delivery of the speech.'[109] Furthermore, Soards argued that Plümacher had underestimated the degree to which

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[106]The view that Acts belongs to the genre of historiography still remains the dominant position in scholarship. For recent summaries of the state of the question in scholarship, see Adams 2012; Phillips 2006.

[107]*De Thucydide* 42-46; cf. Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War* 2.60-4.

[108]Plümacher 1972:138-139.

[109]Soards 1994:142. Emphasis his.

Luke has adapted the speeches to his characters.[110] He did, however, concur that the speeches in Acts often change the subject and seem to introduce material irrelevant to the situation.[111]

Despite those reserves, several scholars emphasize the care with which Luke has crafted speeches adapted to the speaker and the audience of the speech.[112] Marguerat goes as far as claiming that 'the Thucydidean rule is applied to the letter in Luke, who shows an impressive care for verisimilitude in the reconstruction of the oratory art.'[113] For those reasons, the starting hypothesis of this project is that Luke has crafted a speech which does justice to the verisimilitude of his narrative. Correspondingly, it will be necessary to also take into account more seriously the fact that the speech is addressing not only a Greek audience but also Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.

1.3.3.   A re-examination of the teachings of Stoicism and Epicureanism

In light of Rowe's emphasis about the nature of ancient philosophy as complex traditions, this project also proceeds to a more thorough examination of Stoic and Epicurean teaching on the divine and piety. Indeed, although exegetes have long identified many parallels to Stoicism and even Epicureanism in the speech, to date no analysis of the speech has examined in details what Stoic and Epicurean philosophers taught about proper piety, or even divine images.[114]

Furthermore, the descriptions of the Stoic and Epicurean attitude towards traditional Greek religion or their theology in those discussions are regularly incomplete and even inaccurate. For example, most of the time Epicurean views on religion and piety are simply totally overlooked in the analysis of this passage.[115] When they are discussed, usually minimally, commentaries often assume that Epicureans were wholly critical of Greek religion and/or materialistic in the modern sense of the term.[116] This is simply inaccurate. Similarly, in the case of Stoicism, even though exegetes regularly point out that the attitude of the Stoics towards traditional religion was usually more conservative and accommodating, it is still common in discussions on Acts 17 to focus on their criticism of divine images or temples. Those interpretations partly reflect the way scholarship has understood the attitude

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[110]Soards 1994:142.

[111]Soards 1994:142.

[112]E.g. Tannehill 1991; Marguerat 2004:14, 17-19.

[113]Marguerat 2004:19.

[114]Instead, studies have focused on their teaching on knowledge of the divine.

[115]Concerning the religious opinions of the Epicureans, Fitzmyer (1998:604) simply notes that the Epicureans believed that 'the cosmos is the result of chance, and that there was no such thing as a provident god.'

[116]Johnson 1992:313: 'Their commitment to a Democritean explanation of reality in terms of atomic particles was connected to a resolute rejection of religion.' Walaskay 1998:165: 'The Epicureans were pragmatic atheists who taught that belief in the gods is not particularly useful, especially in light of life's inevitable sufferings. Even if the gods do exist, they obviously do not care much about human beings.'

of Hellenistic philosophy towards ancient religion in the past century, namely as critical or accommodating but in tension with it. In recent decades, however, new and more nuanced paradigms have been advanced to understand the relationship between philosophy and religion in the ancient world.[117]

For those reasons, this project also re-examines the teaching of Stoicism and Epicureanism on piety and the divine in the first century. The popularity of Stoicism in the early Roman empire is well attested, and some recent studies also suggest that Epicureanism was more widespread and well-known than has sometimes been assumed.[118] There are thus good reasons to believe that both Luke and his more educated readers would have been familiar with their basic teachings on this subject, and perhaps even with some of the nuances of their debates.

1.4. Outline and structure of the argument

The SECOND CHAPTER sets up the basis for the approach taken in this project. It analyses the narrative framework of the speech and its very beginning (17:16-23), and argues that the diverse elements composing it suggest that the immediate context leading to the speech is a *debate with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers on the subject of piety.* It thus proposes that to understand the argument of the speech, it must be read with the knowledge of Epicurean and Stoic teaching on this question, and understood as addressing a crowd familiar with those teachings.

The THIRD CHAPTER focuses on one particular element of the *captatio* of the speech, which plays a key role in determining the subject at hand: namely the characterisation of the Athenians as *deisidaimonesterous* (v.22). Highlighting the methodological problems of past studies on *deisidaimonia*, this chapter challenges the current scholarly consensus that the word means either pious/religious or superstitious. Based on a word study of the terminology in contemporary authors, it offers a new interpretation of the word which takes into account the particular grammar of ancient Graeco-roman religion, and demonstrates how this new understanding sheds further light on the context and reframes the subject of the speech in Acts 17 as not just the nature of the divine as assumed in past scholarship, but the question of divine wrath against humanity and peace with the gods.

The FOURTH CHAPTER then analyses what Stoic and Epicurean philosophers taught about *deisidaimonia* and proper piety between the first century BC and the first century AD. Challenging the common scholarly assumption that the philosophical criticism of *deisidaimonia* focused on

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[117]See, for example, Van Nuffelen 2011 or Opsomer 1996.

[118]Erler 2009; MacGillivray 2012. On the role of philosophy in the Imperial period more generally cf. Trapp 2014.

traditional religion, superstition or the veneration of images, it argues that the philosophers denounced *deisidaimonia* as an inappropriate and unnecessary fear of the gods, reflecting a misunderstanding about their nature. It thus also highlights that their denunciation of *deisidaimonia* was closely connected with each school's demonstration that the gods are not responsible for evil and that they ensure, in some sense, that the righteous are rewarded as they deserve. Finally, it shows that the philosophers opposed *deisidaimonia* to *eusebeia*, piety, which was expressed both by having correct notions about the gods as good and uninvolved in evil, and imitating their nature.

The FIFTH CHAPTER then examines the argument of the speech in Acts 17:22-31. It argues that the speech does not aim to introduce Yahweh as a god unknown to the Athenians as the current and longstanding scholarly consensus affirms, but to explain how they are to relate to him and be free of the fear of hostile gods and divine wrath. This chapter demonstrates that the Christological climax which announces divine judgment through a resurrected man is not only closely connected with the rest of the speech, but actually constitutes its very climax.

In conclusion, CHAPTER SIX discusses how this project sheds new light on the relationship of the speech in Athens and Greek philosophy, and how this new understanding illuminates the argument of the speech and the function of its Christological conclusion. It then examines how this new interpretation of the speech challenges common scholarly assessments of the nature of the Christian message to the Gentiles in the book of Acts, and Luke's purposes.

CHAPTER TWO: SETTING UP THE DEBATE – The Immediate Context and Beginning of the Speech (Acts 17:16-23)

The narrator devotes no less than six verses in setting up the stage for Paul's discourse (17:16–21), suggesting that he has crafted the context of the speech with particular care. While scholars have long noticed the sophistication of this introduction, they have not always taken it into account in their interpretation of the speech. In recent years, however, several studies privileging a narrative approach have re-emphasized the hermeneutical function of this part of the narrative to analyse this pericope and engaged in a detailed examination of its elements.[119]

This chapter re-examines the narrative introduction and the beginning of the speech (17:16-23) in order to establish its exact context and thereby provide a rationale for the approach taken in this project. It argues that both the interpretations which emphasize the speech's continuity with philosophical notions about the divine and those which deny the importance of the philosophical context of the pericope are problematic in light of this introduction. Indeed, three prominent elements in this narrative set-up need to be taken into account in its interpretation: the conflict and perception of newness brought about by the Christian message in Athens, the debate with Stoic and Epicurean philosophers which led to the speech, and the beginning of the speech which suggests that the question at stake is not only the nature of the divine, but more precisely human relationship with the divine—namely piety. Based on those elements, this chapter suggests a new approach to the speech.

2.1. The occasion of the speech: collision and newness in Athens

The narrative context of the speech speaks against interpreting it as a discourse seeking to emphasize Christianity's shared conceptions of the divine with the Athenians or their philosophers. Indeed, according to the narrative, neither Paul, nor the Athenians or their philosophers perceived each other along favourable lines. Rather, the setting suggests a collision between the Athenians and Paul because of his new teaching, and an examination of the apostle before the highest political instance in Athens.

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[119]Rowe 2009; Rowe 2011; Jipp 2012.

2.1.1. Paul's reaction to Athenian worship (v. 16)

The first indication of a conflict in Athens is provided by the reaction of the apostle when he contemplates the city.

> While Paul was waiting for them [i.e. Silas and Timothy] in Athens, his spirit was provoked (παρωξύνετο) within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. (v. 16)

Παρωξύνετο is translated by a wide range of expressions in the literature, including 'quite annoyed,'[120] 'quite disturbed,'[121] 'deeply distressed,'[122] and 'enraged.'[123] An analysis of the use of the word in a sample of contemporary Greek literature and in the LXX, however, suggests that the verb is not used to refer to emotions such as pain, distress, grief, trouble or pity.[124] Rather, it describes irritation, anger or provocation.[125] Verse 16 thus describes a Paul irritated or angry.[126] His negative reaction at a city 'luxuriant with idols,' to use Wycherley's now famous translation of κατείδωλος, corresponds to the narrative's negative stance towards idolatry so far in Acts (e.g.,14: 8-20), and fits the Jewish attitude towards idols.[127] The use of the word εἴδωλον itself suggests that the author embraces the Jewish derogatory view of idols, for the Greeks did not usually call their divine images εἴδωλον, but ἄγαλμα.[128] An εἴδωλον, for the Greeks, referred to a phantom, or any kind of unsubstantial form. It was used to describe an image reflected by a mirror, an image of mind, or the

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[120]Fitzmyer 1998:599.

[121]Pervo 2008:423.

[122]NRSV, Cf. NIV; Rowe 2008:28; Gaventa 2003:248.

[123]Haenchen 1971:515. Schneider 1982:232: 'zornerfüllt.'

[124]This is based on a study of the use of the word in Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities* 1-5 (11x), Diodorus Siculus (51x), Epictetus (1x) and the LXX (52x).

[125]See also LSJ, s.v. παροξύνω, which lists 'to urge, spur on, stimulate,' and 'to provoke, irritate.' In light of Luke's familiarity with the LXX, it is also interesting to note that out of the 52 occurrences of the verb παροξύνω in the LXX, it appears over 40 times in the context of a contention between human beings and God. Sinners 'anger' or 'scorn' the Lord, or the Lord is 'angered' by the wickedness or the idolatry of his people or humanity more generally.

[126]Marguerat 2015:154: 'son esprit est au paroxysme de l'indignation.'

[127]The word κατείδωλος is a *hapax legomenon* in the NT. Wycherley (1968) argues that it should be translated as 'luxuriant with idols' with the sense that Athens was a 'veritable forest of idols.' On the abundance of idols in Athens, cf. Livy 45.27.11 and Pausanias 1.17.1.

[128]εἰκών refers more generally to images, while ἄγαλμα refers specifically to statues of deities. Although εἴδωλον occasionally appears in the fifth century BCE to describe a statue (for example, the image of the dead ruler in Herodotus 6.58), it does not acquire a widespread usage as a term for cultic statues outside of the Jewish context. Cf. Stewart 2003:25-8.

unsubstantiated shadowy form of the dead in Hades. The use of κατείδωλος to describe Athens thus carries the usual Jewish negative connotations attached to idols.[129]

Paul's angry reaction at the view of the abundance of idols in Athens sets up the broader context of his discourse there. The conjunction οὖν in v. 17 indicates that his irritation influenced his decision to debate [διελέγετο] both at the synagogue with Jews and God-fearers, and every day on the marketplace with whomever happened to be there—a strategy which the apostle had never used before in the narrative. The mention of the σεβάσματα—i.e. the objects of awe or worship—Paul observed in Athens at the beginning of the speech (23), and the reference to idols in v. 29 confirms the importance that this first reaction has for the whole pericope.

2.1.2.   The Athenians' perception of Paul and his message (v.18)

The Athenian perception of Paul and his message further suggests an atmosphere of conflict, or at best, a strong discontinuity between the Christian message and the Athenians' own teachings and philosophies.

> τινὲς δὲ καὶ τῶν Ἐπικουρείων καὶ Στοϊκῶν φιλοσόφων συνέβαλλον αὐτῷ, καί τινες ἔλεγον· τί ἂν θέλοι ὁ σπερμολόγος οὗτος λέγειν; οἱ δέ· ξένων δαιμονίων δοκεῖ καταγγελεὺς εἶναι, ὅτι τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασιν εὐηγγελίζετο. (18)

The philosophers' perception of Paul is divided. Some describe him as a *spermologos* and others as a 'messenger of foreign divinities.' The word σπερμολόγος literally means 'picking up seeds,' and refers to a type of bird which eats seeds. When used metaphorically to describe a person, the meaning of the word is more difficult to determine and it seems to have been used with different nuances.[130] At times it seems to simply refer to a 'good-for-nothing who wanders about the market and collects the scraps and debris scattered here and there.'[131] At other times, it designates a gossip or a babbler.[132] For example, Demosthenes (*Cor.* 18.127) denounces his accuser Aeschines who does not plead against him like the righteous Rhadamanthus or Minos, but like a *spermologos* and market-place loafer, who uses pompous words to accuse him. He is a calumniator and a poser who pretends to be cultivated but is destitute of education. Another example is provided by Dio Chrysostom (*Or.* 32.9) who denounces the Cynics who post themselves at street-corners, in alley-ways and at temple-gates and provide people with *spermologia* and other market-talk and thus lead to people's mockery of philosophers.

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[129] Contra Rothschild (2014:28, n.18) who translates κατείδωλον as 'chock-full of monuments' and writes: 'Although common in the LXX, the εἰδωλ-stem need not necessarily imply Jewish idols.'

[130] Spicq, s.v. 'σπερμολόγος,' 1994:3.268.

[131] Spicq, s.v. 'σπερμολόγος,' 1994: 3.268. (cf. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom.* 19.5).

[132] LSJ, s.v. σπερμολόγος III: 'one who picks up scraps of knowledge, an idle babbler, gossip.' In addition to the two examples that follow, cf. Plutarch, *Cohib. ira* 456D, *Alc.* 36; Athenaeus 8.344C.

This last example provides the closest parallel to the context of Acts 17. As Dibelius rightly warned, we cannot be certain that the word has the nuance of 'catch-phrase hunter,'[133] but it is tempting to see in this characterization a foreshadowing of the allusions to the philosophical common-places which Paul uses in his speech. The passage would thus suggest that some of the philosophers perceived Paul to be using scraps of philosophical knowledge without having real knowledge of philosophy, and that he was felt to be some kind of poser, dilettante, or street-philosopher.[134] On all accounts, the term is clearly disparaging and shows the negative perception of Paul by at least part of the philosophers.[135]

Another group of philosophers, however, perceives Paul to be a 'herald of foreign divinities' (ξένων δαιμονίων δοκεῖ καταγγελεὺς εἶναι).[136] Luke explains the reason for this assessment: 'because he was announcing as good news Jesus and the resurrection' (ὅτι τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασιν εὐηγγελίζετο). Since at least Chrysostom, many exegetes have interpreted this as a description of the Athenians' misunderstanding of Paul's message, whereby, hearing his preaching through polytheistic ears, they concluded that Paul is announcing two different divinities—one named Jesus and the other Resurrection.[137] The misunderstanding of the Athenians in this respect thus emphasizes the distorting effect of polytheism and idolatry in their perception of the Christian message. Additional support for this reading is drawn from sources which report that the worship of abstract concepts such as Victory, Love, or Order was common in Athens.[138]

Despite the popularity of this interpretation, however, this reading is unconvincing for both narratival and historical reasons. First, it is difficult to see how Paul's proclamation could lead to the conclusion that the resurrection is a divinity. Nothing in the speech which follows—nor anywhere in Acts—could explain such a mistake. Furthermore, this interpretation implies a very gross misunderstanding between a philosophically educated audience and the apostle. Although not impossible, it does not constitute a very plausible narrative.[139] Finally, and above all, this

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[133]Dibelius 1939:66-67.

[134]Cf. Schmid 1943:82-83; Rowe 2011:37; Marguerat 2015:154.

[135]The demonstrative 'this' compounds the insult. So Gaventa 2003:249; Barrett 2004:830.

[136]In the mouth of the Athenians, δαιμονίων refers either to 'divinities' or more generally to some kind of inferior 'divine beings.' This is the only occurrence of the word in Acts. It is used 21 times in Luke, but always with the meaning of demon, i.e. evil spirit.

[137]Chrysostom, 9.286; Baur 1876:192; Beurlier 1896:344; Dibelius 1939:67; Gärtner 1955:48; Dunn 1996:234; Rowe 2008:28; Schnabel 2012:726. Among unconvinced exegetes: Zahn 1921:603; Jervell 1998:44 ('kaum stichhaltig'); Barrett 2004:831.

[138]Cf. Pausanias 1.17.1, Plutarch *Cim*. 13.6.

[139]So also Zahn (1921: 603-4 [n.52]).: 'Wie aber ‚Philosophen' die sich noch ein wenig gesunden Menschenverstand bewahrt hatten und einiges Interesse für religiöse Fragen zeigten, durch die Verkündigung des Pl [i.e. Paulus] von der Auferstehung des Gekreuzigten und der zukünftigen Auferstehung der verstorbenen

interpretation does not make sense in light of the reaction of the Athenians when they hear about the resurrection in the speech. Indeed, they react by laughing or losing interest and adjourning the meeting (cf. v. 32). This confirms what exegetes frequently emphasize when commenting on this text: the Greeks did not believe in the resurrection and found it laughable. By all accounts then, at least on this point, Luke has created a very plausible narrative. In this light, it makes little sense that the Athenians would have asked Paul to expound his teaching in the first place if they suspected him to be announcing a divinity called Ἀνάστασις. The only way to justify this interpretation is by assuming that the Greeks did not know what ἀνάστασις meant or interpreted it differently, and thus ignored its connection with a bodily resurrection in Paul's preaching. But the word ἀνάστασις is used in Greek literature to refer to the phenomenon of a dead body coming back to life. The most famous passage comes from the mouth of Apollos in Aeschylus and is often quoted as evidence for the Greek lack of belief in the resurrection:

> 'But when the dust hath drained the blood of man, once he is slain, there is no return to life (ἅπαξ θάνοντος, οὔτις ἔστ' ἀνάστασις)' (*Eum.* 647–48).

While this passage does indeed deny that an ἀνάστασις is possible, it also shows that the Greeks used the word to refer to *the return to life of a dead body*. The mention of the draining of blood makes the meaning unambiguous. This is not a reference to disembodied afterlife, but to the coming back to life of a body which has been drained from its blood. Closer to the date of Acts, Lucian uses the word when writing about Asclepius *raising* Tyndareus from the dead and the consequent wrath of Zeus against him (καὶ τὴν Τυνδάρεω ἀνάστασιν καὶ τὴν Διὸς ἐπὶ τούτῳ κατ' Ἀσκληπιοῦ ὀργήν, *Salt.* 45). This is again a clear reference to a coming back to a bodily existence in this world and shows that the Greeks were familiar with the concept of ἀνάστασις. In this light, the suggestion that the Athenians would have expressed interest in hearing a teaching on a new divinity called Resurrection is very unlikely. The personified concepts worshipped by the Athenians were phenomena about which they were concerned, and it is hard to see how a divinity called 'Resurrection' could fall into this category.

Another interpretation of Luke's narrative comment must therefore be provided to explain why the Athenians came to think that Paul was 'the proclaimer of foreign divinities' (ξένων δαιμονίων καταγγελεὺς). My suggestion is that the author signifies that the Athenians understood the good news of Jesus and the resurrection (τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασιν εὐηγγελίζετο) as the proclamation of new divinities because, from a Greek perspective, a resurrection into eternal life can easily be interpreted as a divinization or an affirmation of somebody's divinity. The possession of eternal life in

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Frommen auf den Einfall geraten sein sollten, dass er den Kultus einer Göttin Anastasis einführen wolle, ist unverständlich.'

particular is a divine prerogative.[140] Thus, Paul's proclamation of Jesus' resurrection and a resurrection of the dead (cf. v. 32: ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν) most likely led the Athenians to the feeling that the apostle was announcing foreign gods. Another passage in Acts corroborates this interpretation. In Acts 28, just after having survived a terrible shipwreck, Paul is bitten by a viper on the island of Malta. When they see the creature hanging from his hand, the natives comment: 'This man must be a criminal for even though he has escaped from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live' (28:4).[141] Paul, however, does not drop dead as they were expecting, and the inhabitants of Malta begin to say that he is 'a god' (ἔλεγον αὐτὸν εἶναι θεόν). The conclusion of those Gentiles reflects the association of immortality with divine beings in Greek culture. Paul's incredible immunity to death, displayed by his survival to both the shipwreck and the viper's bite, can only point to one thing: he is a god. Along the same lines, Paul's preaching of the resurrection in Athens led to the conclusion that he was the messenger of foreign divinities.

Going back to the light this sheds on the setting leading to the speech, the perception of the Athenians of Paul as a 'messenger of foreign divinities' confirms the newness of Paul's message to them, just like their comment when they require him to speak before the Areopagus in v. 19-20: 'May we know what is this new teaching (καινὴ αὕτη ἡ [...] διδαχή) which you are presenting? For you bring strange things (ξενίζοντα) to our ears.'

In conclusion, Luke's description of the Athenians' verbal reaction to Paul's message suggests a mixed perception, some philosophers qualifying Paul as a scraper of philosophical knowledge, while others perceiving him to be the herald of foreign divinities. Those two reactions show that the Athenians perceived Paul's message to contain scraps of the familiar, and yet to be new. This is problematic for those who interpret the speech as teaching essentially Stoic doctrine. Furthermore, the description of Paul as a *spermologos* shows the disdain of part of the audience. The question which remains to be discussed is whether the Athenians' perception of Paul as announcing foreign divinities led them to put Paul on trial.

2.1.3. The setting of the speech (vv.19–21)

The exact setting of Paul's speech has been much debated and continues to divide interpreters. Broadly speaking, proposals follow three lines. Either Paul was taken out of the tumult of the market place—probably to the hill of Ares—to pursue his theological conversation or to make a presentation

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[140]See, for example, Cicero, *ND* 2.62, which speaks of benefactors who were deified such as Romulus, or Heracles: 'And these benefactors were duly deemed divine, as being both supremely good and immortal, because their souls survived and enjoyed eternal life.' [LCL]

[141]πάντως φονεύς ἐστιν ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος ὃν διασωθέντα ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης ἡ δίκη ζῆν οὐκ εἴασεν.

of his message before a larger cultured Athenian audience.[142] Alternatively, Paul was brought before the authorities of the Areopagus and put on trial for introducing new divinities.[143] Finally, some scholars have argued that Paul was led before the Areopagus council to examine a possible official sanction concerning the introduction of a new god in Athens,[144] or to examine his right to introduce a new teaching.[145] The issue is whether the scene is to be understood as a hostile and potentially dangerous situation for the apostle or an informal setting with little at stake.

The view adopted here is that Paul was led before the Areopagus to examine his teaching and possibly take legal action against him because he was proclaiming foreign divinities. There is little doubt that the Areopagus possessed the authority to judge and examine religious cases during the first century.[146] That the proclamation of new divinities could be suspicious and treated as a political threat in the first century in the Graeco-Roman world is equally attested.[147] Athens certainly had the reputation of inflicting trials for impiety, including precisely for this offence. Josephus lists five persons who were pursued by the Athenians for religious offences, including the priestess Ninus who was put to death precisely because she was accused of initiating people into the mysteries of foreign gods, and of course Socrates, who was well-known in the ancient world for having suffered a capital charge for a similar offence.[148] What is uncertain is whether Athens still adopted such a stringent attitude in the first century CE, for by then it had assimilated several foreign deities into its pantheon and the sources also praise the Athenians for their tolerance and piety towards foreign gods.[149] Luke himself describes the Athenians as particularly keen on novelty rather than offended by it (v.21).

Beyond the historical question, however, the key issue is whether Luke wishes to convey that the speech was pronounced in the setting of a trial. In this respect, one of the most important

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[142]Wendt 1913:225; Zahn 1921:608; Beyer 1949:106; Bauernfeind 1980:116; Schneider 1982:236; Johnson 1992:314; Jervell 1998:444; Gaventa 2003:249-250.

[143]Barnes 1969; Rowe 2009:29-32; Jipp 2012:569-575.

[144]Winter 1996:72; Schnabel 2014:175.

[145]Dunn 1996:234.

[146]Barnes 1969:412-13.

[147]See the speech which Cassius Dio (52.36.1-2) puts in the mouth of Maecenas when he advises Augustus on the way to manage an empire.

[148]Josephus *Ag. Ap.* 2.262-268. The persons listed are: Socrates, Anaxagoras, Diagoras of Melos, Protagoras and Ninus. Concerning Ninus, he writes: 'They put Ninus the priestess to death, because someone accused her of initiating people into the mysteries of foreign gods; this was forbidden by their law, and the penalty decreed for any who introduced a foreign god was death.' (2.267, [LCL]) Little to nothing is known about this priestess. She might be the one mentioned by Demosthenes in *1 Boeot*. 19.281, which would situate her in the 4th c. BCE.

[149]As far as we can tell, the persons listed by Josephus all lived in the 5-4th c. BC. On the Athenians' condemnation and adoption of foreign cults, cf. Garland 1992.

arguments advanced in favour of the reading of a trial is the abundance of echoes to Socrates which the author has inserted in this pericope and especially the allusion to the charge which led the famous philosopher to be condemned to death for impiety in Athens. The participle ἐπιλαβόμενοι also could suggest that Paul was led to the Areopagus forcefully. At the same time, as is often noted, no charge is brought against Paul before the authorities, nor is any verdict given as is usually the case when Paul is on trial or accused because of his teaching (cf. 18:12–13; 24:2ff). Instead, Paul is asked to explain his 'new teaching.' Those latter elements seem to suggest that Paul is not on trial (yet?), but rather under examination.

In any case, it is unlikely that 'little is at stake'[150] and that what is taking place is an informal conversation. The presence of the Areopagus itself suggests a formal setting. A crucial point to interpret the atmosphere of this pericope is the interpretation of v. 21. Exegetes who claim that there is no threat to the apostle point to this verse as a key evidence that it is only curiosity which motivates the Athenians' move. But the author's aside in v. 21, which points out that 'all the Athenians and the foreign residents spent their time doing nothing but speaking and listening to something new,' is not introduced explicitly as an explanation grounding the interrogation of Paul by the Areopagus in Athenian curiosity (v.20). One would have expected a conjunction like γάρ if this were the case, and not δέ. The alternative is to interpret the comment as an authorial aside drawing attention to the irony of the situation at hand and highlighting the self-contradiction of the Athenians who are guilty of the criticism they level against Paul.[151] Indeed, while they describe Paul as a *spermologos*, they are the ones who spend their time propagating any kind of news (εἰς οὐδὲν ἕτερον ηὐκαίρουν ἢ λέγειν τι ἢ ἀκούειν τι καινότερον); while they claim that Paul announces foreign divinities (ξένων δαιμονίων), a new teaching (καινὴ διδαχή), and strange things (ξενίζοντα), Athens is filled with foreigners (ἐπιδημοῦντες ξένοι) and eager for anything new (τι καινότερον). It is difficult not to see a certain irony in those parallels.

A final conclusion on the setting of the speech remains difficult. The evidence points towards a contentious situation and a formal examination before an instance with judicial power, yet without a formal charge nor a verdict. Part of the reason for Luke's apparent lack of precision or ambiguity might lie in the fact that, as Barnes has argued, examinations in the Roman world did not follow a uniform practice and informal process was the norm.[152] For those reasons it seems that what took place was an examination of Paul's teaching by the Areopagus, which would have, if necessary, taken measures against him.

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[150]Contra Gaventa 2003:250.

[151]δέ could be read as a mild contrastive: 'But all the Athenians…'

[152]Barnes 1969:413.

Again, such a setting speaks against reading the speech's message as showing strong continuity with Greek philosophical teaching. Rather, it suggests that Paul's message was likely considered suspicious or at least worthy of a more formal discussion.

2.2. The philosophical context: debating with Stoic and Epicurean philosophers on piety

If the immediate context of the speech describes a collision in Athens and that Paul's teaching was perceived as strange and new at best, and babbling philosophical catch-phrases and suspicious at worst, it also suggests that the apostle interacted with the philosophical context of the Athenians. As discussed in the introduction, several scholars downplay the importance of the philosophical context in the pericope in Athens. The narrator, however, not only makes clear that it is a debate with philosophers which led to the speech, but also depicts Paul as a philosopher grappling with issues which were precisely the crusade of the philosophers.

2.2.1. Debating with Stoic and Epicurean Philosophers

The most obvious sign of the philosophical atmosphere of the pericope is of course the mention that Paul interacted with Stoic and Epicurean philosophers on the marketplace in verses 18-19. What is not always observed, is that the narrative suggests a direct connection between this event and the discourse to the Areopagus.

> And also, some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were arguing (συνέβαλλον) with him, and some said: 'what does this *spermologos* want to say?' But others said: 'He seems to be the proclaimer of foreign gods,' for he was announcing the good news of Jesus and the resurrection. 19 And they took him and led him to the Areopagus and said: 'Can we know what is this new teaching which you are speaking about? For you bring strange things into our hearing. We therefore want to know what that might be.'

It is not absolutely certain that Luke wishes to convey that the assessments of *spermologos* and 'proclaimer of foreign divinities' are made by the philosophers and that they are the ones who take him before the Areopagus. But the accusation that Paul is a *spermologos*—a poser or third-rate street philosopher—would make particularly good sense on their part. It is unlikely that the speech was addressed only to philosophers, since the Areopagus must have included a broader audience. But the connection drawn between Paul's conversation with philosophers and them leading him before the Areopagus, as well as the many allusions to philosophical common places which have been identified in the speech, suggest that the conversation which Paul was having with the philosophers on the marketplace provides the background of his speech before the Areopagus.

The mention of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers raises the question as to why the author singles out those two philosophical schools, rather than just speaking of 'Greek philosophers' generally. Many scholars contend that the choice reflects the fact that the Epicurean and the Stoic schools were very popular or the most popular in the first century CE.[153] But there is little reason to suppose that the Academics were not equally popular. Another common explanation is that the mention of the Stoics prepares the way for the frequent connections the following speech makes with Stoicism.[154] Barrett also sees some allusions to Epicurean doctrine in the speech and thus explains the mention of Epicurean philosophers.[155] This explanation is on the right track.

Importantly, however, the philosophers are described as 'arguing' (συνέβαλλον) with Paul.[156] The word points to a debate. Despite their puzzlement about – or lack of respect for– Paul's new teaching, then, the philosophers were *willing* and *able* to interact and argue with Paul. Luke thus intimates that there was sufficient common ground and interest between the parties to engage in a serious conversation.

The connection the narrative makes between the debate with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers and the speech before the Areopagus, as well as the echoes to some of their doctrines in the speech demonstrates the importance of this background to interpret the discourse. In this light, a very plausible hypothesis is that author has the tenets of Stoicism and Epicureanism in mind as he is writing this pericope, and signals the importance of this background to understand the passage to his readers.[157] Two further elements of the passage strengthen this interpretation.

2.2.2. The Socratic allusions

Another interpretative clue provided by the immediate context of the speech are the allusions to Socrates and his trial in the narrative. Echoes were picked up early by Christian exegetes and modern scholars almost consensually acknowledged that there is an allusion to the great Greek philosopher in this passage.[158] Many sources testify that Socrates was remembered as a philosopher who spent his

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[153]E.g. Gärtner 1955:47; Marguerat 2015:154.

[154]Dibelius 1939:66-67; Barrett 1974:72.

[155]Barrett 2004:829.

[156]Some exegetes translate the verb as 'conversing,' which is of course possible. In light of the philosophical context, however, the verb is better translated as 'arguing' because this was the mode of interaction between philosophers of different schools. Cf. Marguerat 2015:154: 'συμβάλλω (18a) est le verbe de la joute oratoire.' Barrett 2004:829: 'argued with him.'

[157]Cf. Barrett 1974:72: 'It is suggested here that the two schools are named because Luke has their tenets in mind, and alluded to them in the speech he puts in Paul's mouth.'

[158]Justin (*II Ap*. 10.5-6) might be the first testimony to such an association among ancient readers. He argues that Socrates in his teaching urged the Athenians to know 'the unknown god' [ἄγνωστος θεός]. (cf.

time in the agora conversing with philosophers and sophists.[159] The participle παρατυγχάνοντας in v.17 is particularly reminiscent of Socrates' habit of conversing with anyone willing to discuss with him: ὅτῳ ἂν ἀεὶ ἐντυγχάνω ὑμῶν (Plato, *Apol.* 29d). Some exegetes also see in the depiction of Paul 'reasoning' (διελέγετο, v.17a) in the agora a possible allusion to Socrates' well-known methodology of *elenchus*,[160] although the verb διαλέγομαι is frequent in Acts and its evocative power thus limited. The strongest allusion, of course, remains the 'charge' levelled against Paul, which is penned with a terminology highly reminiscent of the accusation which led to Socrates' death.

φησὶ γάρ με ποιητὴν εἶναι θεῶν, καὶ ὡς **καινοὺς** ποιοῦντα **θεούς,** τοὺς δ' ἀρχαίους οὐ νομίζοντα (Plato *Euthyphr.* 3b; cf. *Eutyphr.* 1c; 2c; *Apol.* 24bc, 28e-30e *passim*)

ἀδικεῖ Σωκράτης οὓς μὲν ἡ πόλις νομίζει θεοὺς οὐ νομίζων, **ἕτερα δὲ καινὰ δαιμόνια εἰσφέρων·** ἀδικεῖ δὲ καὶ τοὺς νέους διαφθείρων (Xenophon *Mem.*1.1.1; cf. 1.1.3 *passim*; *Apol.* 10-11)

τίνος γὰρ ἑτέρου χάριν Σωκράτης ἀπέθανεν; [...] ὅτι **καινοὺς** ὅρκους ὤμνυε καί τι **δαιμόνιον** αὐτῷ σημαίνειν ἔφασκε νὴ Δία παίζων [...] (Josephus *Ag. Ap.* 2.263)

ἀδικεῖ Σωκράτης, οὓς μὲν ἡ πόλις νομίζει θεοὺς οὐ νομίζων, **ἕτερα δὲ καινὰ δαιμόνια** εἰσηγούμενος· ἀδικεῖ δὲ καὶ τοὺς νέους διαφθείρων. (Diogenes Laertius 2.40)

ξένων δαιμονίων δοκεῖ καταγγελεὺς εἶναι […] ἐπιλαβόμενοί τε αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἄρειον πάγον ἤγαγον λέγοντες· δυνάμεθα γνῶναι τίς ἡ **καινὴ** αὕτη ἡ ὑπὸ σοῦ λαλουμένη διδαχη; **ξενίζοντα** γάρ **τινα εἰσφέρεις** εἰς τὰς ἀκοὰς ἡμῶν (Acts 17:18-20)[161]

What Luke wishes to convey through those allusions has been more debated.[162] But at the very least he pictures the apostle like a new Socrates, and makes him enter the role of a philosopher by depicting him as debating in the agora with passers-by and with other philosophers. Some exegetes deny that Luke characterizes Paul like a philosopher on the ground that his message takes the form of a

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Sandnes 1993:20; Rowe 2011:32 [n.3-4]). On the parallels between Paul and Socrates in this text, see for example Sandnes 1993, Marguerat 2015.

[159]Plato, *Apol.* 1.17c; 17.30b; Xenophon, *Mem.* 1.1.10; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 2.21; Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 54.3.

[160]Laertius, *Lives* 2.20, 45, 122; Plato, *Apol.*19d, 33a, 38a; *Resp.* 454a.

[161]In addition to the parallels mentioned above, cf. also Justin *1 Apol.* 5.4; *2 Apol.* 10.5.

[162]Several exegetes argue that this characterization shows that Luke wants to depict Paul as a teacher of integrity and truth who was misunderstood by his contemporaries (e.g. Dunn 1992:233; Marguerat 2015:152), others underscore that the characterization underscores Paul's respectable status (Marguerat 2015:152). Those proposals are not incompatible with the present analysis.

proclamation (cf. καταγγελεύς, καταγγέλλω) and not an argumentation.[163] But this introduces a dichotomy which Luke does not make since the philosophers in his narrative debate with the apostle, and reflects an anachronistic distinction between 'religion' and philosophy. Not only is our concept of 'religion' a recent invention which did not exist in the ancient world,[164] but the nature of ancient philosophy differed significantly from our notion of philosophy in the modern world.[165] In particular, it was characterized by an allegiance and commitment to an understanding of the world and life-style which makes it look strangely like what we categorize as religion today.[166] It was, in any case, the philosophers and not the priests who, in the Graeco-Roman world, provided most of the teaching which today falls in the category of theology, religion and ethics.[167] The different philosophical schools proposed explanations of the nature of the gods and their interaction in the world, the way one should live and behave towards them, and how to deal with evil or death. Hence, when he describes the different Jewish sects of the first century – the Essenes, the Sadducees and the Pharisees – Josephus calls them the 'three *philosophies* of old of the Jews' (*Ant.* 18.11).[168] In this context, the early Christian movement—which is indeed called a 'sect' (αἵρεσις) in Acts 24:14—and the Greek philosophical schools would indeed have been 'rivals' in the Graeco-Roman world. This they were not in the sense that nascent Christianity would have been perceived as a real threat by any of Hellenistic schools, nor in the sense that it used a similar type of argumentation as the philosophers, but in the sense that Christianity provided an *alternative* explanation of the same topics treated by the philosophers and thereby called to a different embeded life.[169]

In addition to characterizing Paul as a 'philosopher,' the allusion to the charge brought against Socrates has often been interpreted as a sign that the apostle is on trial, or at least to underscore the seriousness or even ominousness of Paul's situation. The trial and death of Socrates was one of the

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[163]Jervell 1998:444.

[164]On this see the next chapter, especially section 3.1.2 and note 208.

[165]Sedley 1989: esp.102; Trapp 2014.

[166]Sedley 1989; Trapp 2014. As Trapp (49) writes: 'Rightly understood and taken seriously, philosophy was, as explained above, the art of life. From the philosophical point of view, therefore, real commitment to it ought to mean something more than an acknowledgment of a body of knowledge and doctrines, and appreciation of a corpus of fine writing; it ought to mean a continuing – indeed, lifelong – dedication to a personal project of self-improvement, a cumulative process of working on one's outlook, perceptions, and emotions, so as to approximate ever closer to the ideals of character-structure and relation to the world established by the great philosophers as right and fulfilling for thinking human beings […].'

[167]In his discussion of this subject, Van Kooten (2010:395) comments that 'Platonism (and philosophy in general) was religion for the intellectual elite.'

[168]Cf. Josephus *War* 2.119-166.

[169]On the similarities between Hellenistic philosophies and early Christianity, see, for example, Stowers 2001; Van Kooten 2010.

most famous events in antiquity, and there is little doubt that Luke intends an allusion here.[170] As discussed above, it is difficult to be conclusive about the setting. But in light of the broader context of the pericope at hand, the allusion most likely also serves another obvious function which has been surprisingly overlooked in the literature: to evoke and underscore the seriousness of the subject debated at hand, i.e. piety. Socrates' trial was not only known as an unjust trial against one of the greatest philosophers, but it was the most famous trial against ἀσέβεια. As many ancient sources describe it, Socrates was charged with *impiety* because he brought new gods and did not worship those of the city. The characterization of Paul along the lines of a new Socrates then, and the allusion to his trial for impiety suggest that Luke presents the scene as a debate between Paul and the Athenian philosophers on proper piety. Another element which reinforces this interpretation is the fact that the figure of Socrates regularly appears in philosophical discussion about piety,[171] and that many philosophers considered him to be the paragon of piety.[172]

The Socratic allusions then reinforce the philosophical atmosphere of the pericope, but also cast it as a debate between the Christian representative and the philosophers about proper piety. This is confirmed by the beginning of the speech.

2.2.3.   The *deisidaimonia* of the Athenians and their ignorant worship

The last element which suggests that Paul's conversation with the Greek philosophers forms the background of this pericope is his *Anknüpfungspunkt* with this audience at the very beginning of his speech, namely his mention of the altar to the unknown god as a proof that the Athenians are *deisidaimonesterous* (δεισιδαιμονεστέρους) (v.22).

The highly debated meaning of *deisidaimonesterous* as well as its relation to the altar to an unknown god will be discussed in the next chapter. What is significant at this point and which several scholars have noticed is that *deisidaimonia* was precisely an object of criticism by Hellenistic philosophers. In particular, the Epicureans had made it one of the two central aims of their philosophy to eliminate *deisidaimonia*, together with the fear of death. Not only so, but Hellenistic philosophers denounced *deisidaimonia* as a form of perverted piety and the expression of *ignorance*, an assessment which the speech echoes by qualifying Athenian worship as 'ignorant' (ἀγνοοῦντες, v. 23).

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[170]Dunn 1992:233; Pervo (2008:425) notes that anyone with a modest Greek education would hear an ominous development in the charge brought against Paul.

[171]E.g., Philodemus *Piet.* 701-720.

[172]Obbink 1996:379. The Stoics, especially Epictetus, were particularly admirative of Socrates, and called themselves Socratics. The Epicureans, however, were generally critical of Socrates, including of his teaching on piety. On Socrates in Hellenistic philosophy, cf. Long 1988.

By pointing to Athenian *deisidaimonia* and denouncing their ignorant worship at the beginning of his speech, Paul thus enters a well-trodden philosophical domain, and, as shall be seen in chapter 3, an area of debate among the philosophers.

In this context, those verses also shed important light on the subject of the speech. By and large interpreters have concluded from v. 23 that the purpose of the speech is to announce the nature of the true God, who is unknown to the Athenians. This exegesis of v. 23 will be examined in detail later. What can be pointed out now, however, is that the problem of the Athenians is not only their object of worship, but the *way* they worship, i.e. their piety. This is signaled by ἀγνοοῦντες which functions as an adverbial participle modifying εὐσεβεῖτε, and is confirmed by the structure of the speech, which is built around three negative sentences all commenting on the worship practices of the Athenians: 1. the God who made the world […] does not dwell in temples made by human hands (v. 24), 2. nor is he served by human hands (v. 25), 3. Therefore, being the offspring of God, we must not think that the divine is like artefacts of gold, silver, and stone (v. 29).

Accordingly, the background conversation and subject of the speech should not only be understood as the nature of the divine, but also the nature of proper piety, both of which were closely linked in ancient philosophical discussions.[173] Indeed, it is the nature of the gods which determines the way humanity must relate to them. Again then, allusions to *deisidaimonia* and ignorance at the beginning of the speech, both of which were used by Hellenistic philosophers to describe problematic piety, suggest the importance of the philosophical context in this pericope.

2.3. Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the narrative context invalidates interpretations of the speech which emphasize its continuity with Greek philosophy. Indeed, not only does Paul react with anger at the numerous idols displayed in Athens, but the philosophers either perceived Paul to be a babbler possibly using philosophical catch-phrases, or to be the proclaimer of foreign divinities. In any case, they all perceived his teaching as new and strange, and not as congenial. The setting of a formal examination of his teaching before the Areopagus most likely suggests that it was even suspicious to some. There is no reason to think that Luke intends the content of the speech before the Areopagus to be different from what the apostle discussed with people on the marketplace, and the reaction of the Athenians at the end of the speech (v. 32) confirms that the message is new, strange and for many, laughable.

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[173]This will be detailed in chapter 3.

At the same time, and importantly, the narrative and beginning of the speech raises serious questions for interpretations which deny or even downplay the importance of the philosophical background in this pericope. Not only does Luke picture the speech as the consequence of Paul's debate with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, but he also pictures him as a new Socrates trading on the very specific philosophical turf of the Epicureans by tackling the *deisidaimonia* and ignorance of the Athenians.

Although those two assessments might seem contradictory and irreconcilable, they need not be, and it is at this point that past interpretations have missed a crucial hermeneutical clue given by those few verses. Indeed, instead of suggesting that the speech must be read as either seeking continuity with the philosophers or without any connection with Greek philosophy, the narrative context shows that the discourse in Athens must be understood within the context of a *debate* between Paul and Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. This has crucial methodological consequences. Indeed, instead of examining the parallels between the speech and philosophical teaching and comparing them in terms of continuities and discontinuities of motifs, a more appropriate approach will be to analyse how the speech's teaching on piety differs from the teaching of those philosophical schools, and possibly how it addresses elements of the debate on this subject between Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.

Before turning to an examination of Stoic and Epicurean teaching on this question, however, another element of this introduction must be re-examined in more detail in the next chapter: the much-debated meaning of *deisidaimonia*.

CHAPTER THREE: NEITHER 'PIETY,' NOR 'SUPERSTITION' – Redefining *Deisidaimonia* in the context of Graeco-Roman Religious Grammar (c. 100 BCE–120 CE)

One of the longstanding interpretative questions of the pericope in Acts 17:16-34 is the meaning of δεισιδαιμονεστέρους at the beginning of the speech. It is a common assumption in scholarship that the noun from which this adjective is derived, δεισιδαιμονία, has two usages, one positive or neutral, meaning 'religion,' 'piety' or 'reverence,' and one negative, expressing 'superstition,' or 'excessive fear of the gods.'[174] Determining the nuance of the characterization of the Athenians as δεισιδαιμονεστέρους in Acts 17:22 has thus become an important clue to determine the narrative's attitude towards Greek religiosity: is Paul being praiseworthy or at least building upon something positive in the religious attitude of the Greeks despite their mistaken worship of idols, or is he dismissing Athenian piety outright as 'superstition'? The issue has long been debated in modern scholarship and there is little sign of a coming consensus on the question.[175] The arguments used on both sides of the debate highlight the difficulty of settling the issue.

On the one hand, many exegetes argue that the terminology should be translated by 'very religious' or 'very pious' because it is part of Paul's *captatio benevolentiae*, which—according to the recommendation of ancient rhetorical handbooks—aimed to elicit the goodwill of an audience and to raise its interest.[176] Athenian piety was well-known in the ancient world and it would thus have been a deft way to open his discourse.[177] In any case, it is unlikely that Paul would have begun his speech with an insult. Some interpreters also suggest that this positive description reflects the assessment that the Athenians are worshipping the true God albeit as an unknown god (cf. v. 23).[178]

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[174]See Foerster, 'δεισιδαίμων, δεισιδαιμονία,' in *TDNT*; Spic, 'δεισιδαίμων, δεισιδαιμονία,' in *TLNT*; LSJ s.v. δεισιδαιμονία: 'fear of the gods, religious feeling,' and, in a bad sense, 'superstition.' Versnel, in *OCD*, s.v. δεισιδαιμονία, describes it as 'scrupulousness in religious matters' when it is used positively, and 'excessive pietism and preoccupation with religion' when it is used in a derogatory way. So also Bowden 2008:57; Moellering 1963:47; Martin 2004:18. Those two usages are assumed by most exegetes in their discussion of the terminology in Acts. E.g, Jervell 1989:445: 'δεισιδαίμων kann sowohl negativ etwas Minderwertiges, etwa "abergläublisch", als auch anerkennend "gottesfürtig, religiös, fromm" bedeuten.'

[175]Already in 1929, Koet (24-25) writes that the meaning of the word is debated.

[176]Koet 1929:25; Schneider 1982:237-38; Conzelmann 1987:140; Johnson 1992:314; Klauck 2000:81; Pervo 2008:433; Rothschild 2014:30-31; Holladay 2016:342.

[177]Cf. Sophocles, *Oed. Col*. 260; Pausanias 1.17.1; Josephus, *Ap.*2.130.

[178]Haenchen 1971:520-21.

On the other hand, scholars defend the pejorative meaning because v. 16 describes Paul as angry at the idolatry of the city, and the Athenians are said to worship 'in ignorance'—hardly a praiseworthy qualification.[179] It is also argued that the speech echoes the philosophical criticism against 'superstition,' ignorance or curiosity being characteristics of *deisidaimonia* according to the philosophers.[180] As for the argument that Paul's speech must begin with a *captatio*, it is pointed out that 'Paul's words are to be understood as a *captatio benevolentiae* only if we know that δεισ[ιδαιμονια] is intended *sensu bono*.'[181]

In light of the ambiguity of the evidence provided by the context, a third group of exegetes has suggested that the word is meant to be understood with two levels of meanings, and that Luke exploits the ambiguity of the word.[182] Thus, in the narrative world, Paul's audience would have heard his characterisation positively, while Luke's readership, alerted by the description of Paul's anger in v. 16, would have perceived the irony and discerned the negative assessment of Athenian religiosity in the terminology. As Rowe puts it: '[…] in the story world, the Areopagus hears the former—the Paul of Acts does not blunder verbally so badly or so quickly—while the reader, who is positioned hermeneutically by vv. 16–21, also hears the latter. […] Through a deft use of dramatic irony, Luke unifies historical verisimilitude—and rhetorical skill—with theological judgment and, precisely, alerts the readers of Paul's speech to its multi-level discourse.'[183] Despite its initial attractiveness, however, this last view is not unproblematic either. For even if Luke's implied reader is 'in the know' and suspects that *deisidaimonia* really should be understood as 'superstition' here, he still needs to make sense of Paul's intentionality in his use of the terminology in the narrative world of Acts. Some scholars thus explain that Paul plays on the ambiguity of the word and uses it either ironically or as part of his rhetorical strategy to gain the goodwill of his audience in order to communicate his message.[184] But Luke's implied audience might still wonder if it is really plausible that the angry Paul of the narrative would begin his denunciation of idolatry and proclamation of coming judgment with praise about Athenian religiosity even for rhetorical purposes.

As this brief overview shows, despite the longevity of the debate, none of the attempts to clarify the meaning of *deisidaimonia* in Acts 17 is without problem for the narrative realism of the pericope. Importantly, it is not only in Acts 17 that the current understanding of *deisidaimonia* has led to

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[179]Jervell 1998:445; Jipp 2012:576.

[180]Jipp 2012:576–78; Gray 2005.

[181]Barrett, 2004:836.

[182]Moellering 1963:49; Given 1995:364-5; Klauck 2000: 81-88; Rowe 2011:40.

[183]Rowe 2012:40.

[184]So Moellering 1963:49: 'It is therefore likely that he invests the term with a certain ambiguity so that his hearers will feel there are being commended for their religious scrupulosity, and yet he will be free to proceed to criticize their inadequacies and commend his own faith to them.'

analytical difficulties. Indeed, scholars have long commented that some ancient authors seem to be guilty of self-contradiction or confusion in their use of this term. For example, Diodorus Siculus seems to be using *deisidaimonia* with different meanings and connotations. To explain this inconsistency, it has been argued that this reflects Diodorus' integration of varied sources in his work without taking care to harmonize them.[185] A similar well-known problem occurs with Plutarch's use of *deisidaimonia*: several behaviours and beliefs which are criticized by Plutarch as *deisidaimonia* in his treatise on the question—*De superstitione*—are endorsed in his work elsewhere.[186] This time, scholars have suggested different solutions to explain such discrepancies, the privileged one being that Plutarch's thinking on the question changed, and that he became more 'religious' and mystical when he became older.

The present chapter makes a new proposal to solve this enduring conundrum. It argues that the root of the problem lies in a longstanding misapprehension of the meaning of *deisidaimonia*. Indeed, *deisidaimonia* means neither 'piety, religion' nor 'superstition, excessive fear of the gods.' This chapter suggests that current misconceptions of the meaning of *deisidaimonia* are to a large extent the result of the use of anachronistic conceptual frameworks and categories to analyse ancient religious phenomena. More specifically, past analyses have not sufficiently taken into account the fact that the grammar of ancient religion differed significantly from modern religion, and have tended to read ancient philosophical criticism of religious phenomena through the prism of modern critical attitudes towards religion or superstition.

The present chapter presents an analysis of the use of *deisidaimonia* by ancient authors between the 1st c. BCE and the early 2nd c. CE which seeks to avoid such anachronisms and to present a definition of *deisidaimonia* within the grammar of ancient religious discourse during this period. It begins by highlighting some of the methodological weaknesses of past studies on the question and framing the approach taken by the present study. It is then followed by two sections analysing the use of *deisidaimonia* by ancient authors. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the results of the analyses and shows how they illuminate the meaning of *deisidaimonia* in Acts 17. As this chapter demonstrates, a re-evaluation of the meaning of *deisidaimonia* which takes into account the grammar of Graeco-Roman religion not only provides a new answer to the long-standing debate on the meaning of *deisidaimonia* in Acts 17, but it also sheds light on the apparent contradictions which have been identified in several ancient authors as to their usage of the terminology.

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[185]Koet 1929:9; Martin 1997:121; Martin 2004:79-92.

[186]Moellering 1963; Brenk 1977; Martin 2004:104.

3.1. Methodological concerns in the study of *deisidaimonia*

The present section suggests that past studies of *deisidaimonia* have suffered from two longstanding methodological weaknesses which have led to the current misapprehension of the meaning of this terminology. It then introduces the approach taken in this study.

3.1.1. The lack of semantic study of the terminology of *deisidaimonia*

A crucial problem with current conclusions about the meaning of *deisidaimonia* is that they are not based on a *semantic study* of the terminology informed by modern linguistics. The only substantial study of the terminology of *deisidaimonia* remains Peter J. Koet's *Δεισιδαιμονία: A Contribution to the Knowledge of the Religious Terminology in Greek*, published in 1929. Koet was the first scholar to examine a high number of occurrences of *deisidaimonia* in their respective contexts. He studied the way *deisdaimonia* is used by a significant number of ancient authors ranging from Xenophon (c. 430–354 BCE) to Phavorinus (d. 1537 CE), and his work still represents the most detailed examination of the terminology in ancient literature.[187] Koet's aim, however, was not so much the semantic study of *deisidaimonia* as the verification of the common assumption that the terminology is used (almost) exclusively with negative connotations after Theophrastus (c. 372—c. 287 BCE). Koet demonstrated that the word continued to be used positively after Theophrastus until at least the third century CE even if the negative nuance becomes more prominent after him, and his conclusion has been widely endorsed by scholarship since him. Koet's approach, however, primarily consisted in 'classifying' the usages of *deisidaimonia* along positive and negative connotations. As far as the lexical meaning of *deisidaimonia* was concerned, however, Koet remained vague. In an appendix, he listed seven different meanings for the noun when it is used in a favourable sense, and no less than ten when it is used in a negative sense.

Discussions of *deisidaimonia* after Koet either rely upon his conclusions, or tend to use the same approach, focusing on determining whether the word is used positively and means 'piety, religion' or negatively refers to 'superstition,' or, more broadly, to any religious outlook of which the author disapproves.[188] This approach, however, is unsatisfactory. What is needed is a study of the *meaning* or semantic range of *deisidaimonia* with the help of the tools of modern linguistics, a field

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[187]Other discussions of the terminology include: Spicq, 'δεισιδαίμων, δεισιδαιμονία,' *TLNT* 1:305-8; Moellering 1963:42-52; Baroja 1974:151-161; Martin 1997:110-27; Gray 2004:33-108; Bowden 2008:56-71. See also Martin 2004 on the phenomenology of superstition. The meaning of the Latin word *superstitio* overlaps with *deisidaimonia* in some contexts. On *superstitio*, see: Otto 1909:533-54; Benveniste 1969:273-279; Calderone 1972; Janssen 1975:135-89; 1979:131-59; and especially Grodzynski 1974:36-60.

[188]See the lexical entries s.v. in LSJ, Spicq, or the usual debate about the meaning of *deisidaimonia* in Acts 17 as sketched above.

which has undergone tremendous development since Koet's publication. At the most basic level, this means an examination of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations of *deisidaimonia*.[189] In terms of syntagmatic analysis this implies a study of the contexts and constructions in which the terminology is used. In addition to this syntagmatic analysis, *deisidaimonia* also needs to be analysed in its paradigmatic relations. In other words, what is needed is an assessment of the meaning of *deisidaimonia* over against words which share the same semantic domain. As Jost Trier put it in a classic formulation:

> The value of a word is first known when we mark it off against the value of neighboring and opposite words. Only as part of the whole does the word have sense; for only in the field is there meaning.[190]

To determine the semantics of *deisidaimonia* thus necessitates an examination which delimitate its usage from other semantically closely related words, such as εὐσέβεια, θεοσέβεια or εὐλάβεια, and some of its opposites, such as ἀθεότης or ἀσεβεία. To my knowledge, however, no such study has been conducted. This is particularly problematic in light of the current scholarly consensus that *deisidaimonia* often means 'piety,' which implies that it is used as a synonym to εὐσέβεια or θεοσέβεια.

Finally, such a study will also need to consider each specific author's usage, and be careful in delimiting the timeframe of the analysis, privileging synchronistic study. Indeed, some past studies draw conclusions from authors which are chronologically too distant from each other.[191]

3.1.2. The assumption of anachronistic conceptual frameworks in the study of ancient religion and philosophy

The second enduring and, in many ways, more fundamental problem in past studies of *deisidaimonia* is that they are conducted with modern, and thus anachronistic conceptual frameworks and models, rather than within the frameworks and grammars of antiquity. More precisely, those analyses import modern religious categories and especially 'post-Enlightenment' 'grammars' of religion to examine ancient 'religious' phenomena and ancient philosophical criticism. The grammar of ancient religion,

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[189]Jobs 1994:202: 'Modern linguistic theory teaches that the meaning of a given word is not located primarily in the word itself but is determined by the relationship the word has to other words in the context of a give occurrence (syntagmatic) and by the contrast it forms with other words which share its semantic domain (paradigmatic).'

[190]Trier 1931:6 translated and quoted in Silva 1994:161.

[191]For example, Moellering (1963:57-58) draws conclusion on the pre-Christian use of the word based on Christian usage. But the word's meaning seems to have changed quite significantly in Christian literature.

however, differed significantly from the structure of modern monotheistic religion, and, despite some apparent similarities, ancient criticism in this field cannot be assumed to proceed along the same lines as the modern philosophical criticism of religion or superstition. By using anachronistic categories and models and attempting to fit ancient texts into them, studies both distort the data and fail to account for it in its entirety.

This problem is well illustrated by the persistence of the literature in using the word 'superstition' to translate *deisidaimonia* when it is used *malo sensu.* This is the case not only in most major dictionaries and lexica, but also in much literature on this topic.[192] For example, this is the way *deisidaimonia* is translated in Moellering's study *Plutarch on Superstition* (1963), or in Martin's two recent studies (1997, 2004). Certainly, several scholars warn that it is misleading or even mistaken to translate *deisidaimonia* as 'superstition' because it does not correspond to what is understood by this modern English terminology.[193] Bowden goes as far as arguing that it is a 'commonplace' 'that there is no exact equivalent of the word "superstition" in Greek.'[194] Despite this, the literature shows that it is still often assumed in scholarship that *at least in some cases, deisidaimonia does* correspond to what in English is designed as superstition.[195] It is easy to see how scholars could reach this conclusion when reading, for example, Theophrastus' portrait of the *Deisidaimōn* in his *Characters.*

> The Superstitious Man is the kind who washes his hands in three springs, sprinkles himself with water from a temple font, puts a laurel leaf in his mouth, and then is ready for the day's perambulations. If a weasel runs across his path he will not proceed on his journey until someone else has covered the ground or he has thrown three stones over the road. When he sees a snake in his house he invokes Sabazios if it is the red-brown one, and if it is the holy one he sets up a hero-shrine there and then. […] He is apt to purify his house frequently, claiming that it is haunted by Hekate. […] He refuses to step on a tombstone or go near a dead body or a woman in childbirth, saying that he cannot afford to risk contamination. (Extracts from Theophrastus, *Char.* 16 [Diggle])

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[192]Moellering 1963; Martin 1997; Martin 2004. So also in commentaries and studies on Acts 17:22, such as Jervell 1989:445; Rowe 2011: 39. Note, however, Haenchen 1971:520, n.7: 'δεισιδαίμων is […] by no means 'superstitious'—that is a modern concept! […]'

[193]Cf. Moellering 1963:42: 'To translate *deisidaimonia* as superstition is not only inadequate; it is misleading.' Koet 1929:99: '…it is inexact to translate δεισιδαιμονία by 'superstition', as it very seldom means that, if we take this word in the modern sense.'

[194]Bowden 2008:56.

[195]Koet (1929:99) points out that *deisidaimonia* 'very seldom means' 'superstition,' thereby implying that sometimes it is an accurate translation.

According to Theophrastus then, the behaviour of the *Deisidaimōn* is strikingly reminiscent of what would today be characterized as 'superstitious.'[196] Indeed, the online Oxford Dictionary gives the following two definitions of 'superstition.'

1. Excessively credulous belief in and reverence for the supernatural.
2. A widely held but irrational belief in supernatural influences, especially as leading to good or bad luck, or a practice based on such a belief.[197]

Despite the warning voiced by scholars against understanding *deisidaimonia* along the lines of the modern concept of 'superstition' then, *in practice deisidaimonia is still generally translated as 'superstition'* and studies still assume that its meaning is similar to the modern concept. This assumption is further illustrated by two other elements.

First, there is in the literature a continual tendency to identify *deisidaimonia* as referring to *religious practices or beliefs*, such as the worship of images, sacrifices or belief in oracles, myths or supernatural events. For example, Moellering writes:

> How Polybius understands *desidaimonia* is apparent in his criticism of Timaeus whom he denounces for having his work filled with the supernatural: dreams, prodigies, fantastic stories, or to put it briefly: δεισιδαιμονίας ἀγγενοῦς καὶ τερατείας γυναικώδους ἐστὶ πλήρης. (Moellering 1963:52)

Similar understandings of *deisidaimonia* as a term referring to specific religious practices and beliefs can be found in most studies on the subject.[198]

And second, as the quote from Moellering shows, *deisidaimonia* is regularly associated with *irrationality* and the *supernatural,* and set in opposition with the rational, a language reminiscent of the criticism of superstition or even religion more generally in modern times. Witness to this is also the tendency to describe ancient critics of *deisidaimonia* as 'enlightened.' Thus, speaking of Polybius' criticism of *deisidaimonia*, Koet calls him an 'enlightened historian' who is critical of all popular religion.[199] Moellering speaks of 'the enlightened rationalism' of Plutarch's critical treaties *De*

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[196]Bowden 2008:58-59. Cf. Gray 2004:33-34: 'There is also much common ground between the mentality that generally passes for superstitiousness today in the West and δεισιδαιμονία or *superstitio* in ancient Greece or Rome. […] The family resemblance with superstition is in fact quite impressive.'

[197]Online Oxford Dictionary, accessed at https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/superstition (7.10.2017).

[198]Koet 1929:70; Martin 1997:114; Martin 2004:94; Gray 2004:34, 47.

[199]Koet 1929:99.

Superstitione, and describes Plutarch as 'repelled by the stupidities and irrationalities of superstition.'[200]

Certainly, scholars have warned against equating the criticism of *deisidaimonia* with the criticism of the supernatural or irrationality. It has often been pointed out, for example, that Plutarch is critical of *deisidaimonia* and yet not opposed to all what is supernatural in ancient religion.'[201] This has been emphasized by Martin in his recent work, where he warns against using anachronistic categories to analyse *deisidaimonia*. As he points out, it is inappropriate to associate *deisidaimonia* with belief in the supernatural and the irrational, the former because the ancients did not use the category of 'supernatural' and considered everything to be part of *physis*, and the latter because what is rational is largely subjective.[202]

As a result, some scholars, and particularly Martin in his recent studies, have attempted to find the 'logic' or the 'rationale' which made something worthy to be criticized as *deisidaimonia* by ancient authors.[203] A common conclusion has been that *deisidaimonia* is excessive piety, or excessive fear.[204] Another claim advanced in particular in discussions of Theophrastus is that he condemns certain practices as *deisidaimonia* because they are connected to private rather than public worship.[205] In his 1997 article, Martin emphasizes that philosophers criticized *deisidaimonia* because it broke upper-class social etiquette.[206]

The problem with those studies, however, is that, although they rightly reject the imposition of the anachronistic *category* of 'supernatural' to understand ancient discourse, they still assume that the *grammar* which underpins *deisidaimonia* and its criticism in antiquity follows the same logic or grammar which underpins the modern criticism of superstition or religion. In other words, they still assume that *deisidaimonia*—although not necessarily associated with the supernatural or irrationality like modern superstition—nonetheless refers to 'those forms of popular religion' with which their critics are out of sympathy.[207] This, however, reflects a *modern grammar* of superstition in which 'superstition' broadly refers to 'inappropriate religious behaviour.' It is thus still using an *anachronistic grammar* to analyse the data. What is needed, however, is not just a redefinition of

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[200]Moellering 1963:103, 114.

[201]Koet 1929:99; Moellering 1963:52.

[202]Martin 1997:113; cf. Martin 2004:13-16.

[203]Martin 1997:115; Gray 2004:34.

[204]Moellering 1963:53-54; Martin 1997:119; Haenchen 1971:520, n.7.

[205]Lane Fox 1997:152.

[206]Martin 1997:114. In his 2004 book, Martin gives many definitions of superstition, associating its criticism with the denounciation of excess, the 'other,' shameful behaviour, or the attribution of shameful behaviour to the gods. Cf. for example, 2004:111.

[207]Koet 1929:33.

ancient versus *modern* understandings of superstition, as those studies presuppose, but a study which considers the possibility that the ancients *did not* criticize ancient religious behaviour or belief at all when they spoke of *deisidaimonia*.

The same remarks apply to the scholarly claims that *deisidaimonia* means 'piety' or 'religion' when it is used *sensu bono*. It is misleading to associate *deisidaimonia* with the modern categories of 'religion' and 'piety,' without carefully defining those categories within ancient religious grammar. Scholars have long noted that there is no Greek term equivalent to the English concept of 'religion.' Εὐσέβεια is the closest equivalent, but it only overlaps with the meaning of 'religion' in some contexts. The Greeks simply did not use this category.[208] It was not part of the *grammar* they used to speak about what we today call 'religious' phenomena. Therefore, to claim that *deisidaimonia* sometimes means 'religion' would need at the very least careful qualifications, and is in fact unlikely to be a useful category to describe this ancient phenomenology. Likewise, to comment that *deisidaimonia* means 'piety' is unhelpful without explaining precisely what the ancients meant by piety.

In its study of *deisidaimonia*, therefore, scholarship needs to take into account the different nature and grammar of ancient religion. To say—as is currently common in scholarship—that δεισιδαιμονία should be translated as either 'religion' or 'superstition' is unhelpful and misleading, for in antiquity people simply did not think in those categories. What is needed is an examination of *deisidaimonia* on the ancients' *own terms* and within the framework of their own conception of 'religion.' For this reason, the present chapter has retained the transliteration *deisidaimonia* to translate δεισιδαιμονία rather than using the misleading terminology of 'superstition' as most studies do.

3.1.3. Ancient definitions of *deisidaimonia*

To attempt an understanding of *deisidaimonia* on the ancients' own terms, this study uses as its starting point and preliminary hypothesis the ancient definition of *deisidaimonia*. When they defined *deisidaimonia*, the ancients simply described it as the 'fear of the gods.' This definition seems to prevail until the end of the second century CE.

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[208]See Nongbri (2013:4,7), who insists that the notion of religion is a recent invention which cannot be assumed to be a universal concept, and which is still mistakenly used by scholars of ancient Greece when they talk about 'ancient Greek religion.' Cf. Bremmer (1998:12) who notes that the use of 'religion' in this context is 'an etic term' and does not reflect the perspective of the actor since 'the Greeks themselves did not have a word for "religion."'

Indeed, it would seem that *deisidaimonia* is cowardice towards the divine (δειλία πρὸς τὸ δαιμόνιον). (Theophrastus, *Char*.16.1 [MC])[209]

Shame is fear of contempt; commotion is fear with noise urging on us; *deisidaimonia* is fear of the gods or the divine powers (φόβος θεῶν ἢ δαιμόνων) […]
(Arius Didymus [1st c. BCE], *Epitome of Stoic Ethics* 10χ, = *SVF* 3.408 [MC]) [210]

But *deisidaimonia*, as the appellation also indicates, is an emotional opinion and an assumption productive of a fear which utterly humbles and crushes man, for he thinks that there are gods, but that they are causing pain and harmful. [. . .] Whence it follows that atheism is falsified reason, and *deisdaimonia* an emotion engendered by false reason. (Plutarch, *Superst*. 165BC [MC])

Of all fears, the most impotent and helpless is *deisidaimonia*. (Plutarch, *Superst*. 165D [MC])

But the disposition (διάθεσις) toward god of the ignorant but not greatly wicked majority of people contains no doubt when they worship and pay reverence (τῷ σεβομένῳ καὶ τιμῶντι) an element of tremulous fear (μεμιγμένον τινὰ σφυγμὸν καὶ φόβον) – and this we call *deisidaimonia* (ᾗ καὶ δεισιδαιμονία κέκληται) (Plutarch, *Suav. viv.* 1101D9 [MC])

In addition, at least since the first century CE, δεισιδαιμονία is sometimes contrasted with εὐσέβεια.

Concerning this and the worship of the gods, what is done appropriately for their honour, the inherited customs and the complete tradition, take measures to lead the youth only into piety but not into *deisidaimonia*, teaching them to sacrifice, pray, kneel and to swear oaths according to custom and at appointed times according to fit measure. (Cornutus [1st c. CE], *Theologiae Graecae Compendium* 35 [MC]) [211]

At other times, δεισιδαιμονία is defined in relation to both εὐσέβεια and ἀθεότης or ἀσέβεια. In this case, δεισιδαιμονία and ἀθεότης/ἀσέβεια are the two extremes to be avoided—both being vices and

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[209]The line, like other introductory definitions in the *Characters*, is often considered to be a later addition, although this view is not without its opponents (cf. Lane Fox 1997:164, n.140). But even if it is the case, it is very likely that it was added before Philodemus (1st c. BCE), and it thus provides another early definition of *deisidaimonia.* Cf. Diggle 2004:17-18.

[210]See also the Stoic definition of *deisidaimonia* as a kind of fear in *SVF* 3.394, 409, 411.

[211]According to Grodzynski (1974:38, n.1), Cornutus is the first to contrast the two words.

perversions of piety—and εὐσέβεια is the mean, i.e. the virtue which should be strived for. Such statements are found, for example, in Plutarch and Philo, and, according to Stobaeus, in Aristotle and the Peripatetics.

> For thus some who flee *deisidaimonia* fall into a harsh and opposite atheism (ἀθεότητα), thus overleaping piety (εὐσέβειαν) which lies in between. (Plutarch, *Superst.* 171F [MC])

> The mean between temerity and cowardice is courage, […] and between *deisidaimonia* and impiety (ἀσεβείας), piety (εὐσέβεια). (Philo, *Imm.* 1:164 [MC])

> Therefore, piety (εὐσέβειαν) is the art of serving the gods and the divinities, being situated between atheism (ἀθεότητος) and *deisidaimonia* (Stobaeus II, 147, 1–3 [MC]).

Such statements suggest that *deisidaimonia* could be described as an 'excess,' possibly an excess of fear or piety, something which is also suggested by Cornutus' passage above.

To conclude, when they define δεισιδαιμονία in the period which concerns us (1st c. BCE – early 2nd c. CE), ancient writers describe it as a 'fear of the divine,' and regularly contrast it with εὐσέβεια, sometimes even explicitly opposing them, εὐσέβεια referring to proper piety and δεισιδαιμονία to a perversion of it.[212] It is also noteworthy that while all the definitions examined are found in philosophers, they represent diverse philosophical traditions (Stoic, Peripatetic, Platonist and a Jewish writer) and are thus not specific to a particular philosophical circle.

3.1.4. Methodology of this study

The ancient definitions of *deisidaimonia* examined above is the starting hypothesis which will be tested in the present study. The next sections examine whether *deisidaimonia* always means 'fear of the gods' and whether it is always used distinctly from *eusebeia* between the first century BCE and the early second century CE. Indeed, although scholars regularly acknowledge the importance of the aspect of 'fear' connected with many occurrences of *deisidaimonia*, it is also often argued that the ancient definition of 'fear of the gods' does not fit all occurrences of *deisidaimonia*, or that it is not precise enough.[213] This study re-examines the evidence while taking care to avoid the methodological

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[212]A similar definition of *superstitio* and distinction between *superstitio* and *religio* or *pietas* is found in some Latin authors. E.g., Cicero calls *superstitio* an *inanis metus* (*ND* 1.42.117) and Varro writes: *Superstitioso dicat (*scil. *Varro) timeri deos, a religioso autem tantum vereri ut parentes, non ut hostes timeri (ap.* Augustine, *Civ. Dei*, VI, 9). Cf. also Cicero, *ND* 2.28.72; *Div.* 2.52.148–149; Seneca, *Clem.* 2.5.1.

[213]Gray 2004:36; Martin 1997:113; in 2004:18–9, Martin argues that the definition is accurate if 'both halves of the terms are allowed a wide range of meaning.'

pitfalls highlighted earlier. To do so, it focuses on four authors and analyses their usage of *deisidaimonia* over against their use of *eusebeia* and *eulabeia,* two words belonging to the same semantic field. It also seeks to examine the meaning of those words *within the grammar of ancient religion*, and to avoid imposing anachronistic framework on the data.

Because it has been claimed that the philosophers understood *deisidaimonia* differently from other parts of the elite and common people, the first of the next two sections focuses on the usage of the terminology in three non-philosophical authors: Diodorus Siculus (90–30 BCE), Strabo (c. 64 BCE–c. 24 CE) and Josephus (37–100 CE).[214] While those three authors are all part of a Hellenistic educated elite and can hardly constitute evidence for the way *common* people understand the terminology, none of them has any philosophical commitment to the major Greek schools of their time, and their use of the terminology occurs mainly in narrative material rather than in reflections or comments about religious practices. They thus represent important evidence of how the terminology was understood and used outside of philosophical circles and debates. The second section then examines the use of *deisidaimonia* in Plutarch, who has clear philosophical commitments, but also wrote a significant amount of narrative in his *Lives*. The next chapter will then focus more specifically on the philosophical discussion about *deisidaimonia*.

3.2. The use of *deisidaimonia* in historians and geographers

3.2.1. Diodorus Siculus (90–30 BCE)

3.2.1.1. *Deisidaimonia*

Diodorus Siculus uses δεισιδαιμονία 20 times, δεισιδαιμονέω 13 times and δεισιδαίμων four times in his *Bibliotheca*.[215] Although this conclusion has been challenged, analysis suggests that the meaning 'fear of the divine' fits well in each occurrence. For heuristic purposes, the contexts into which he uses the terminology can be classified into two groups.

First, *deisidaimonia* occurs when there is a concern of potential breaches of rituals or laws involving the gods, such as sacrileges, issues of ritual purity, or simply evil doing. Thus, *deisidaimonia* prevents people from committing sacrilege, such as stealing dedicated gold or offerings (5.27.4; 5.63.3), killing sacred animals (1.83.8), or breaking their sacred oaths (11.89.6; 11.89.8; 1.79.2). More generally, *deisidaimonia* spurs people to live a life pleasing to the gods and refrain from

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[214]For example, it is a central argument in Martin 2004 that the philosophers criticized *deisidaimonia*, whereas part of the rest of the elite and common people were unconvinced by their discourse and continued to use the terminology with positive connotations.

[215]All searches in this chapter were conducted with TLG, except for Josephus, whose searches were conducted with Bibleworks' search engine.

evil (1.70.8; 34/5.2.47), or fills them when they have done or about to do something sacrilegious (27.4.8; 27.4.5) or evil (20.43.1).

Second, *deisidaimonia* fills people when a particular event—especially an unusual event—leads them to think that the gods could be hostile towards them. Those events include phenomena in nature such as lightning, earthquakes, plague, war, military defeat, painful sicknesses, sudden death or other strange happenings (sea-monsters—17.41.6; hermaphrodites—32.12.3; 32.12.1). It also encompasses omen-like phenomena happening through human beings such as visions, ancient prophecies, or curses (17.41.8; 19.108.2; 15.54.4). Unsurprisingly then, people can be manipulated because of their *deisidaimonia*, either by priests (3.6.3; 36.13.2), oracles (15.54.4) or magicians (4.51.1).

What those two contexts have in common is that they are all susceptible to generate fear or anxiety about incurring the hostility of the gods. Often this hostility is perceived as divine punishment (1.70.8;1.83.8). Thus, in both types of situations, *deisidaimonia* may lead to attempts to propitiate the gods (15.54.4; 13.86.3), often through sacrifices (20.14.5; 34/5.10.1).

As has been pointed out by previous studies, there are, however, three cases which do not seem to fit this analysis because *deisidaimonia* is accompanied by happy expectations of help from the gods.[216] In the first instance, *deisidaimonia* occurs in the context of a military campaign, and is prompted by the apparition of a sea-monster:

> As the construction of the Macedonians stretched to the range of emission of their missiles, a portent was sent from the gods to those being in danger. For from the sea a wave tossed an incredibly great sea-monster upon their constructions, which fell upon the bank and did nothing evil, but leaning against a portion of its body for a long time, brought consternation [κατάπληξιν] to those watching, and swimming back into the sea, drew both sides into *deisidaimonia*. For each side was attempting to interpret [διέκρινον] the sign as Poseidon being about to help them, inclining by their judgments [ῥέποντες ταῖς γνώμαις] towards their own interest. (17.41.5–6 [MC])

Martin argues that here '*deisidaimonia* refers to the *false* belief that a freak occurrence is a *good* omen.'[217] But a good case can be made that *deisidaimonia* also refers to fear in this context. Indeed, the strange event—interpreted as a sign from Poseidon—filled both sides with consternation (κατάπληξιν) and anxiety (*deisidaimonia*) as they were attempting to evaluate which side was to be the object of the help coming from the god, because the alternative was that they would be the

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[216]Cf. Martin 1997:122.

[217]Martin 1997:122 (italics original).

enemies of the god![218] Διέκρινον is best interpreted as a conative imperfect here, meaning 'attempting to judge or evaluate,' and reflects the interpretative ambiguity of the sign. Thus, each side is trying to discern what the sign means and to interpret it as a sign of Poseidon's favour, the alternative being of course that it signals Poseidon's hostility – hence the mention of the fear of the gods (*deisidaimonia*) in this context. The fact that each side is inclined to interpret it towards its own interest, and thus optimistically, is not incompatible with a first reaction of anxiety or even a continuing nervousness despite the hope of being helped by the god. The situation of danger created by the context of war (κινδυνεύουσιν) and the incertitude concerning the interpretation of a portent which signals the intervention of a powerful divinity in the conflict, all suggest a context of anxiety, even if the sign is also generative of the hope of possibly being helped by the god. This interpretation seems corroborated by the next sentence in Diodorus, which reads: 'There were other strange happenings (σημεῖα παράδοξα) also, which could bring confusion and fear (διατροπὴν καὶ φόβον) among the people.'

The second instance occurs when Eumenes attempts to gain the cooperation of the other commanders after the death of Alexander. To secure their good-will, Eumenes claims to have had a dream in which king Alexander appeared to him, and he suggests that they set up a throne for him where they hold their meetings and that they offer incense to Alexander every morning. Quickly Alexander is treated like a god, and Diodorus writes:

> As their *deisidaimonia* for the king grew stronger [ἅμα δὲ καὶ τῆς κατὰ τὸν βασιλέα δεισιδαιμονίας ἐνισχυούσης], they were all filled with happy expectations, just as if some god were leading them. (18.61.3 [LCL slightly modified])

Martin writes: 'It is hard to say exactly what *deisidaimonia* is here except religious reverence for Alexander, which is certainly not considered inappropriate by Diodorus.'[219] But again, the passage makes good sense with the nuance of fear, and a better translation would be '*fearful* reverence' in the context at hand. Indeed, Diodorus refers to the growth of the anxiety or nervousness not to offend the new god which accompanies the development of the new cult. This is not incompatible with the development of 'good hopes' which are created by the presence of the new god. Indeed, both go hand in hand (cf. ἅμα) in the context of Greek religion, where relationships with the gods are precisely characterized by this dual possibility: the hope of help if the gods are pleased, and the fear of harm if they are offended or simply in a bad mood. The new cult thus enabled Eumenes to rally all the commanders under the authority of the divinized Alexander whose divine leadership would command

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[218]See the similar association of κατάπληξις with danger and fear in Thucydides 7.42; 8.66.

[219]Martin 1997:122.

fearful reverence and create great hopes, and thereby establish Eumenes as 'a man worthy of the solicitude of the kings' (18.61.3).

In the last case Medea brings a terrifying statue of Artemis (τὴν θεὸν διεσκευασμένην καταπληκτικῶς) and uses her magical tricks to convince a city that Artemis in person has come into their midst to bring them good luck.

> …Medea entered the palace, and she threw Pelias into such a state of *deisidaimonia* and, by her magic arts, led his daughters into such consternation/amazement [κατάπληξιν] that they believed that the goddess was actually there in person to bring prosperity to the house of the king. (4.51.3 [MC])

Again, the mention of the magical arts and amazement/consternation thereby created suggests that what people feel here is not just 'reverence' or 'piety,'[220] but the fearful reverence and awe which comes with the sense that a powerful god is present, a feeling compatible with the hope of being helped by the goddess if she is favourable. As in the previous example, this is a case where *deisidaimonia* is created for the sake of manipulation.

To conclude the analysis of those three cases, even though each time *deisidaimonia* occurs in a context where there are also good hopes, the nuance of fear and anxiety is still present. In each case, *deisidaimonia* is created by an unusual event which is interpreted as a manifestation of divine presence or will. This creates a sense of fear and unease, which is mixed with the hope of divine help. Although this mix of fear and hope might seem strange to modern readers, it is by no means in the context of Greek religion, where the sudden manifestation of a divine presence both fills people with the anxiety and the hope which come from the presence of a powerful being which can both be offended and help—indeed, such are the Greek gods.

Before comparing Diodorus' use of *deisidaimonia* with his use of *eusebeia*, three more remarks must be made at this point with respect to common understandings of the terminology. First, *deisidaimonia* never refers to particular religious practices or beliefs. Rather, it describes an emotion or attitude, namely the feeling of fear of the gods, and more particularly the *fear of being the object of divine hostility or wrath*. Second, although one of the contexts in which *deisidaimonia* appears is unusual phenomena which moderns might label 'supernatural' (visions, sea-monsters, eclipses), its usage is not limited to those situations. For example, doing evil can fill a person with *deisidaimonia*. Conversely, not all instances of 'supernatural' phenomena give rise to *deisidaimonia*. Finally, concerning the connotation of *deisidaimonia*, it is noteworthy that the terminology is always used descriptively: it is used to refer to the 'fear of the gods' or of the divine, and does not in and of itself

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[220]Martin argues that the most common way Diodorus uses *deisidaimonia* is with the meaning of 'piety' or 'proper respect' (2004:81).

connote an assessment of the religious practices or feelings of people, whether positive or negative. Thus, the terminology is never explicitly used to describe a virtue or a vice, for example. Only in a few cases, does the author comment on the 'validity' or 'usefulness' of the feeling, and interestingly, his assessment depends upon the circumstances at hand. Thus, Diodorus finds *deisidaimonia* inappropriate in the case of hermaphrodites—which he considers a natural phenomenon rather than a sign of divine displeasure (32.12.1). On the other hand, the historian finds *deisidaimonia* necessary to maintain morality in society at large, for very few people are virtuous because of their character, and most need the motivation which comes from the fear of divine retribution (34/5.2.47). In the great majority of cases, however, Diodorus does not comment and one is hard pressed to determine a pejorative or approving connotation. What is clear, is that there is no sign in his writings that he does not believe in the validity of traditional religious practices such as omen, prophecies and sacrifices to maintain a good relationship with the gods.[221] Indeed, the narrative he tells shows that sacrificing out of *deisidaimonia*—i.e. fear of divine hostility—can indeed avert bad things from happening, and the gods certainly do punish people (e.g., 14.77.4).

Because his assessment of *deisidaimonia* differs, Diodorus' use of this terminology has often been deemed inconsistent. It is said that he sometimes uses it with the nuance of 'piety, reverence' and at other times as 'excessively religious, superstitious.'[222] To explain those contradictions, scholars have pointed to the diverse sources used by the historian, arguing that he used them without much editing and thus incorporated different perspectives on *deisidaimonia*.[223] But understanding *deisidaimonia* as meaning 'fear of the gods' shows that his usage is perfectly consistent. *Deisidaimonia* always means 'fear of the divine' for Diodorus, whether it has the nuance of fear of divine hostility, fear of offending the gods or fearful reverence. Sometimes Diodorus comments on its necessity, but in the majority of cases he does not. *Deisidaimonia* is simply a common religious phenomenon in Greek religion. Sometimes Diodorus finds it unwarranted, but most of the time, he seems to find it quite normal. He is aware that this fear of the gods can be used to manipulate, but even in those cases, he usually does not comment on the morality of the practice.

3.2.1.2. *Eusebeia, theosebeia and eulabeia*

Moving to Diodorus' usage of closely related words, the historian never uses θεοσέβεια or θεοσεβής, but he does use εὐσέβεια 48 times (+ εὐσεβής 17 times), and εὐλάβεια 9 times (never εὐλαβής). Εὐσέβεια is best translated by 'piety' or 'reverence.' Diodorus uses εὐσέβεια in three types of contexts.

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[221]Cf. Martin (1997:123): 'As this and several other stories show, Diodorus himself takes things like omens, prophecies, and astrology quite seriously.'

[222]Koet 1929:9.

[223]Koet 1929:9; Martin 1997:121; Martin 2004:79-80.

Most frequently, εὐσέβεια refers to the *virtue* of piety. It is thus often used to characterize people positively, winning them the appreciation or admiration of both men and gods. It regularly occurs in lists of virtues or in coordination with other virtues such as δικαιοσύνη, χρηστότης or φιλανθρωπία. Just as proper human relationships should be characterized by 'righteousness,' εὐσέβεια describes the proper attitude of human beings towards the gods.[224] Εὐσέβεια makes one the friend of the gods and brings their favour or reward (5.7.7; 8.15.5), while the gods take vengeance upon the impious. The terminology can be used to characterize not only a person's attitude towards the gods, but her moral character generally. Implicit is of course that a person pious towards the gods must be virtuous and thus righteous towards men. Thus Diodorus often uses the adjective εὐσεβής substantively to refer to the 'pious' as opposed to the 'impious' or 'wicked' (8.15.2), and to talk about the fate of the deceased, who might be received in the company of the 'pious' (92.5.11) or endure the punishment of the 'wicked' (τῶν πονηρῶν, 93.3.3; τῶν ἀσέβων, 96.5.5).

Second, Diodorus sometimes uses εὐσέβεια with a meaning coming close to 'cult,' referring to the set of practices involved in the worship or reverence towards a particular deity (e.g. 4.8.5). Thus the Athenians were the first to honour Heracles as a god and the Greeks followed them in their reverence (εὐσέβεια) for the god (4.391). Finally, εὐσέβεια can refer to an attitude towards human beings (e.g. towards strangers—4.46.4; towards parents—4.52.2).

In conclusion, two elements stand out in Diodorus' use of εὐσέβεια in comparison to δεισιδαιμονία. First, εὐσέβεια is always positively connoted. Indeed, εὐσέβεια is a virtue and is thus a term of praise. And second, apart from two passages, εὐσέβεια never occurs in the context where there is a fear of divine punishment or a possibility to offend the deity. The first exception is in 12.57.4, where the Cercyraenans absolve suppliants which had fled to the altars of the gods 'out of their reverence of the gods' (διὰ τὴν πρὸς θεοὺς εὐσέβειαν), something which could be interpreted as a fear of incurring divine hostility if they had executed the suppliants. But the use of εὐσέβεια here probably gives a different nuance to the event in that it emphasizes that it is the piety of the Cercyraenans which motivated their action, rather than a fear from punishment from the deity. A similar case seems to be 33.5.2, where suppliants come to the Arcadians with branches of supplications and their city's idols, hoping to change their resolution by their piety towards the gods (θεῶν εὐσεβείᾳ).

Moving to Diodorus's use of εὐλάβεια, the terminology appears in contexts which partly overlap with δεισιδαιμονία, but it seems to imply an idea of 'restraint' rather than 'fear.' It is used in non-religious contexts where it refers to 'caution' or 'precaution' (8.12.8) or timidity, excessive caution (23.11.1). In religious situations, it occurs in similar contexts as *deisidaimonia* (sometimes the two words occur in the same paragraph: e.g., 13.12.6; 15.53.4), where there is a potential threat to be

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[224]The two are often linked: 'They who do not cherish piety towards the divinity show all the less concern to observe justice towards men.' (7.12.7)

the object of divine hostility. In those cases, it is difficult to assess whether there is a different nuance between *deisidaimonia* or *eulabeia,* but *eulabeia*'s connotation of 'restraint' seems still present in that it is often used in contexts where something is *not* done or taking place out of precaution or caution towards the divinity. For example, in the story of Nicias, even those who are sceptical that the eclipse and an epidemic reflect divine disapproval are compelled to postpone the departure of the army 'out of caution towards the divine' (τὴν πρὸς τὸ θεῖον εὐλάβειαν, 13.13).

3.2.1.3. *Conclusion*

In conclusion of our analysis, the evidence suggests that Diodorus consistently uses *deisidaimonia* and *eusebeia* in different contexts and with different nuances. *Deisidaimonia* means 'fearful reverence towards the gods,' 'fear of hostility from the gods,' and refers to the anxiety or concern to avoid the hostility and harm of the divine. On the other hand, *eusebeia* means piety, worship or reverence without the nuance of fear. Finally, *eulabeia* means caution, precaution, but also appears in similar contexts as *deisidaimonia*, where there is a concern not offend a divinity.

3.2.2. Strabo (c. 64 BCE–c. 24 CE)

Judgements about Strabo's use of *deisidaimonia* must remain more tentative as the geographer does not uses the terminology which interests us frequently: δεισιδαιμονία – 4x, δεισιδαίμων – 3x, εὐσέβεια/εὐσεβής – 8x, θεοσέβεια/θεοσεβής – 3x, εὐλάβεια/εὐλαβής – 0x. A good case can be made, however, that Strabo uses *deisidaimonia* with the nuance of 'fear of the gods' or 'fear of offending the gods' and *eusebeia* to refer to the positively connoted characteristic of piety or worship-reverence towards a deity.

3.2.2.1. *Deisidaimonia*

Looking first at the seven instances of δεισιδαιμονία and δεισιδαίμων, in three cases Strabo uses the terminology like Diodorus, in contexts where the breach of rituals or laws creates an anxiety of offending the gods and becoming the object of evil sent by them. Thus, like Diodorus, Strabo speaks of *deisidaimonia* preventing people from stealing gold in sacred lakes (4.1.13), and he also considers that *deisidaimonia* is useful to deter from evil (1.2.8). This latter passage is worth quoting in full, for it sheds helpful light on the relationship between *deisidaimonia, eusebeia* and myths and marvels:

> Most of those who live in the cities […] are deterred from evil courses when, either through
> descriptions or through typical representations of objects unseen, they learn of divine
> punishments, terrors, and threats—or even when they merely believe that men have met with
> such experiences. For in dealing with a crowd of women, at least, or with any promiscuous
> mob, a philosopher cannot influence them by reason or exhort them to reverence [εὐσέβειαν],

piety [ὁσιότητα] and faith [πίστιν]; nay, there is need of religious fear also [ἀλλὰ δεῖ καὶ διὰ δεισιδαιμονίας], and this cannot be aroused without myths and marvels [μυθοποιίας καὶ τερατείας]. For thunderbolts, aegis, trident, torches, snakes, thyrsus-lances, —arms of the gods—are myths, and so is the entire ancient theology. But the founder of states gave their sanction to these things as bugbears wherewith to scare the simple-minded. (1.2.8 [LCL])

This passage is particularly helpful for it illustrates the difference between εὐσέβεια and δεισιδαιμονία. As in Diodorus, εὐσέβεια is a positive behaviour (here associated with the other virtues of ὁσιότης and πίστις) towards which people are to be encouraged. *Deisidaimonia*, however, refers to the fear of the gods' retribution and plays a role as a deterrent from evil doing. The passage also sheds light on the relationship between myth and *deisidaimonia:* for Strabo *deisidaimonia* cannot be aroused without myths. Indeed, it is the mythological stories casting the gods as terrifying warriors and speaking of divine punishment which keep people in check morally, which is why politicians approve of those things as 'bugbears' aiming to scare away from evil doing. Thus, *deisidaimonia* is necessary as a deterrent from evil doing for the simple-minded—which includes women and common men.

The third case where *deisidaimonia* clearly refers to a fear is when Strabo speaks of the *deisidaimonia* which makes the gulf of Avernus a shadowy place (5.4.5). The word refers to the fear of the divine associated with the entrance of the underworld, and Strabo explains that legends report that the birds flying above the gulf fall into the water killed by the vapour arising from it, and only those who have propitiated the nether deities can sail above it.

In the other four occurrences of *deisidaimonia*, the context is not as clearly connected to divine punishment or hostility, but a good case can be made that the terminology can be appropriately translated by 'fear of the gods,' or 'fearful reverence.' In the first case, Strabo finds it implausible that people living without women would be particularly 'pious' [θεοσεβεῖς] because it is well-known that women are the main initiators of *deisidaimonia* [τῆς δεισιδαιμονίας ἀρχηγούς].

And of course to regard as 'both god-fearing [θεοσεβεῖς] and capnobatae' those who are without women is very much opposed to the common notions on that subject; for all agree in regarding the women as the chief founders of *deisidaimonia* [τῆς δεισιδαιμονίας ἀρχηγούς], and it is the women who provoke the men to more attentive worship of the gods [θεραπείας τῶν θεῶν], to festivals, and to supplications, and it is a rare thing for a man who lives by himself to be found addicted to these things.' (7.3.4 [LCL slightly modified])

Although LCL translates *deisidaimonia* by 'religion' and it might be tempting to render it by 'piety' as a synonym of the preceding θεοσεβεῖς, the fact that Strabo speaks about women here suggests that he uses *deisidaimonia* with the nuance of 'fear of the gods' rather than piety. Indeed, as 1.2.8 has shown, Strabo believes that women cannot be convinced into piety by reason alone but that they also

need *deisidaimonia* (fear of divine punishment). He further singles out women as particularly prone to *deisidaimonia*. In light of this earlier assertion, it is unlikely that Strabo would characterize women as the chief founders of 'piety' in 7.3.4. Rather Strabo is pointing out that women being the most anxious about the gods and most nervous about not offending them, they are the ones who push men into taking more *care of the gods* (θεραπείας τῶν θεῶν). At the same time, this passage shows that *deisidaimonia* is closely intertwined with the cult of the gods and piety, and not necessarily incompatible with it.

In the second case, Strabo speaks about a 'substance mixed with wood and earth' 'which is used in large quantities as frankincense by the *deisidaimones*' [ᾧ πλείστῳ χρῶνται θυμιάματι οἱ δεισιδαίμονες] ([MC] 12.73). LCL translates δεισιδαίμονες as 'worshippers,' but the nuance of fear fits well here also in that Strabo is probably referring to the large quantities of frankincense used by those who are anxious to appease the divinity or protect themselves from negative divine action.

Finally, the last two occurrences appear in a passage discussing Jewish religion (16.2.37). Strabo describes the successors of Moses in this way:

> His successors for some time abided by the same course, acting righteously and being truly pious [θεοσεβεῖς] towards god; but afterwards, in the first place, men fearful ofs god [δεισιδαιμόνων] were appointed to the priesthood, and then tyrannical people; and from the fear of god [δεισιδαιμονίας] arose abstinence from flesh (from which it is their custom to abstain even today), circumcisions, excisions and other observances of the kind.' (16.2.37 [MC])

In this passage, the worship characterized by *deisidaimonia* is contrasted with the true piety and righteousness which characterized the regime of Moses and his immediate successors, thereby assessing it negatively. Furthermore, it is identified as the cause which led to practices such as abstinence from flesh and circumcision, which Strabo contrasts with the worship advocated by Moses which was not oppressive or troublesome for the people (16.2.36). Again, the nuance of 'fear to conciliate the divine' fits the context: it is priests anxious about the divinity and about not offending it who introduced religious practices such as food taboos and circumcision.

While the contexts of those last four examples are not as explicitly associated with the fear of divine hostility as the two contexts identified in Diodorus, what they have in common is that they describe a situation in which an increase or abundance of religious practice is explained by *deisidaimonia*. This certainly fits the nuance of anxiety about the divine.

3.2.2.2. *Eusebeia and theosebeia*
This understanding of Strabo's usage is corroborated by an examination of his use of *eusebeia* and *theosebeia*, which shows that he uses them in contexts similar to those in which Diodorus uses of *eusebeia*. Strabo seems to use *theosebeia* like *eusebeia*, which appears again in three contexts. Like

Diodorus, Strabo uses εὐσέβεια to refer to a desired character trait, coordinating it with other virtues (2x; cf. 1.2.8; 15.1.60), also using the adjective εὐσεβής in the context of a discussion of the abode of the pious in the afterlife (3.2.13). In addition, the terminology is also used with a nuance close to 'religious practices' (7.3.3). Finally, in two occurrences it refers to piety towards human beings (parents or a former commander—6.2.3; 13.1.26).

Thus, like Diodorus, Strabo uses *eusebeia* in contexts different from those of *deisaimonia*. *Eusebeia* never occurs in situations involving the fear of divine hostility.

3.2.2.3.   *Conclusion*

Although they must remain tentative in light of the few uses Strabo makes of the terminology, the following two remarks can be made about the geographer's use of *deisidaimonia*. First, all his uses make sense with the meaning 'fear of the gods,' or 'fearful reverence.' Indeed, like Diodorus, Strabo uses the terminology in contexts where there is a fear of offending the gods through sacrilege, evil doing, or breaching rituals connected to the gods, and also sometimes associates it with marvels. In this respect, Strabo importantly highlights the connection between *deisidaimonia* and myths and tradition. Belief in myth is not of itself an expression of *deisidaimonia*, but belief in myth fosters *deisidaimonia*, since the myths depict the gods in a way which fosters fear of them because they sometimes do evil to men, or because they can be offended. In addition, Strabo also uses *deisidaimonia* in association with the multiplication or abundance of religious practices. Here again, anxiety about the divine is the cause of such abundant practices.

Second, moving to the connotation of *deisidaimonia* in Strabo, only in one passage—the one discussing Jewish religion—does Strabo clearly assess *deisidaimonia* negatively, contrasting the *deisidaimonia* of later priests with the proper piety (*theosebei*s) and righteousness advocated by Moses. While his discussion of myths shows that Strabo is sceptical towards them, there is no reason to believe that he rejects other traditional beliefs or practices, including those meant to appease the gods. Like Diodorus, Strabo is aware of the use of people's fear of divine punishment for political or social reasons, but again he sometimes sees this as necessary and useful for society. Finally, Strabo implies that women are more prone to *deisidaimonia*.

3.2.3.   **Josephus (37–100 CE)**

3.2.3.1.   *Deisidaimonia*

Δεισιδαιμονία occurs 15 times in Josephus, but because he recounts the same incidents several times, those 15 times actually only refer to 9 different situations. One of the particularities of his usage is that, out of those occurrences, 10 occur in the speech of foreigners. Although Josephus' usage is often cited as evidence that *deisidaimonia* frequently simply meant 'religion' in the ancient world, it is argued here that Josephus uses the terminology consistently with the nuance of 'fear of offending the

gods.' The contexts in which he uses *deisidaimonia* are similar to those identified in Diodorus and Strabo in that they all reflect a concern not to offend a divinity, but with a particular nuance since they mainly occur in the context of Jewish and not Greek 'religion.'

Thus, like the preceding authors, Josephus uses *deisidaimonia* when particular events happen which can be interpreted as signs of divine displeasure. For example, Agatharchides mocked Stratonice for her *deisidaimonia*, because she obeyed a dream which forbade her to sail away and was thus caught and put to death (*C. Ap.* 1.208). Manasseh's *deisidaimonia* towards God after he was hit by war and caught by the king of Babylon also falls in this category (*Ant.* 10.42). Josephus describes Manasseh's repentance of his sins following this divine punishment, and how he displayed much *deisidaimonia* towards God (πάσῃ χρῆσθαι περὶ αὐτὸν δεισιδαιμονίᾳ), consecrated the temple and purified the city. The context of divine punishment and repentance suggest that the nuance of *deisidaimonia* is different from simply 'reverence' (LCL) or 'religious life' (Whiston). Rather, it points to Manasseh's fear of offending the divinity again. As Josephus continues, by those actions Manasseh was 'seeking to make God propitious towards him for the rest of his life' (καὶ διατηρεῖν αὐτὸν εὐμενῆ παρ' ὅλον τὸν βίον) (*Ant.* 10.42). Josephus also uses *deisidaimonia* in the context of political manipulation. He thus describes how the *deisidaimonia* of Alexandra made it possible for the Pharisees to manipulate her so that she put their enemies to death (*War* 1.113). Although both Alexandra and the Pharisees were earlier characterized as pious (108, 110), the use of *deisidaimonia* in this context suggests that Alexandra was concerned to avert God's hostility by eliminating persons hostile to the 'pious' Pharisees.

The other instances of *deisidaimonia* in Josephus all occur in contexts where there is a concern about a sacrilege being committed, or a divine law being breached. Thus, three passages recount events where the Jews react violently because a sacrilege has been committed against God. In the first case, they react because Herod has introduced trophies—which were considered to be images—into their city. As a result, Herod tries to 'free them from their *deisidaimonia*' (τῆς δεισιδαιμονίας ἀφαιρούμενος) (*Ant.* 15.277). Similarly, in the second case, the Jews react to Pilate's introduction of standards in Jerusalem, preferring to die rather than to admit Caesar's images and transgress the law [ἢ τὸν νόμον παραβῆναι]. 'Astonished at the intensity of their *deisidaimonia*' (τὸ τῆς δεισιδαιμονίας ἄκρατον) Pilate commands the removal of the standards (*War* 2.174). In the third case, the Jews, drawn together by *deisidaimonia* (τῇ δεισιδαιμονίᾳ συνελκόμενοι), ask that a soldier who has torn the sacred book of the law into pieces and thrown it into the fire, be punished for such an affront to God and to his law (τὸν οὕτως εἰς τὸν θεὸν καὶ τὸν νόμον αὐτῶν ἐξυβρίσαντα, *War* 2.230). In each case, the Jews' *deisidaimonia* reflects their concern to remove or punish what they considered a serious offense against God.

Along the same line, three others times *deisidaimonia* is used in the context of the Jewish or Samaritan practice of keeping the laws associated with the Sabbath (*Ant.* 12.5; 12.6; 12. 259). The

first two occurrences are used in a passage where Agatharchides of Cnidus reproaches the Jews for having lost their freedom because of their 'unseasonable *deisidaimonia.*' Josephus writes:

> But Agatharchides of Cnidus, who wrote the acts of [Alexander's] successors, reproaches us for our *deisidaimonia,* as if we had lost our liberty because of it, saying: 'There is a nation, called the nation of the Jews, who possess a strong and great city named Jerusalem. And they took no care and let it fall into the hands of Ptolemy because they were unwilling to take arms, and thereby submitted to be under a hard master, on account of their untimely *deisidaimonia*.' (*Ant.* 12.5–6 [MC])

Deisidaimonia is best rendered by 'anxiety or concern not to offend the gods.' [225] A support for this translation is found in Plutarch's discussion of a similar event in his treatise *De superstitione* (169C). Plutarch lists the capture of Jerusalem because of the Jews' refusal to take up arms on the Sabbath as an example of the tragic effects engendered by *deisidaimonia* in critical situations. The context shows that he is effectively criticizing the 'cowardice' [cf. δειλίας] associated with *deisidaimonia*.[226] The second passage mentioning *deisidaimonia* in the context of Sabbath keeping in Josephus confirms this nuance. In this case, a Samaritan speaks about this custom.

> Our forefathers, because of certain droughts in the country and following a certain ancient *deisidaimonia* (παρακολουθήσαντες ἀρχαίᾳ τινὶ δεισιδαιμονίᾳ), made it a custom to observe that day which by the Jews is called the Sabbath. (*Ant* 12:259 [MC])

In light of the verb παρακολουθήσαντες—to follow, to keep—it is better to translate *deisidaimonia* as 'religious scruple' or 'practice born out of fear or concern to avert divine hostility' rather than 'fear of God.'[227] But the mention of the droughts makes it clear that keeping the Sabbath has an apotropaic function and aims to prevent the droughts which are the consequence of divine displeasure or punishment. There is no sign here that this *deisidaimonia* is criticized.

Finally, the last six occurrences of *deisidaimonia* in Josephus occur in the context of a Roman decree and are often pointed to as evidence that *deisidaimonia* can be translated by 'religion.' The

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[225]Note that Josephus refers to the same event in *Ag. Ap*.1.212, criticizing Agatharchides' mockery and pointing out that such a concern for the laws and piety (εὐσέβεια) should be praised.

[226]'…for God is brave hope, not cowardly excuse. But the Jews, because it was the Sabbath day, sat in their places immovable, while the enemy were planting ladders against the walls and capturing the defences, and they did not get up, but remained there, fast bound in the toils of *deisidaimonia* as in one great net.' (LCL slightly modified)

[227]And not 'religious rite' or 'superstitious practice' (cf. Koet 1929:23).

first five times refer to the same instance, whereby a decree from the consul Lentulus exempts the Jews from military service on account of their *deisidaimonia* (δεισιδαιμονίας ἕνεκα, *Ant.* 14.228, 232, 234, 237, 240). The last occurrence appears in an edict from Claudius which permits the Jews to keep their ancient customs and enjoins them not to show contempt for the *deisidaimonia* of other nations, but to keep their own laws only (μὴ τὰς τῶν ἄλλων ἐθνῶν δεισιδαιμονίας ἐξουθενίζειν τοὺς ἰδίους δὲ νόμους φυλάσσειν, *Ant.* 19.290). The expression does not seem to carry negative connotations in any of those instances and has thus been seen as evidence that *deisidaimonia* can mean 'religion.'[228]

But even in those cases, what is at stake is clearly religious scruples, and not simply religious rites or piety.[229] Indeed, the reason for their exemption from military service is that it would prevent the Jews from following the law with respect to the Sabbath and food laws (*Ant.* 14.226). Moreover, the decrees use ἱερὰ Ἰουδαϊκά to refer to Jewish rites (*Ant.* 14.228, 237, 240). When the Jews are asked not to show contempt for the *deisidaimonia* of the other nations, therefore, they are asked not to show contempt for the religious scruples of other nations. At stake is the breaking of each nations religious laws aiming to prevent them from the wrath of their god.[230]

In conclusion, Josephus's use of *deisidaimonia* presents strong parallels to Diodorus and Strabo's usage, but with some adjustments to the Jewish context of his narrative. Again, *deisidaimonia* appears after some events potentially indicating divine hostility or punishment (e.g., a dream, a plague and a military defeat). Likewise, *deisidaimonia* is exploited by religious figures to reach their political ends (the Pharisees). The particularity of Josephus's usage lies in the recasting of the second context which was identified—the fear to breach a religious law—into its Jewish mould. This anxiety thus becomes a fear of breaches or offenses against the Jewish law—such as bringing images in Jerusalem, burning the book of the law, breaking the Sabbath, or the non-respect of dietary laws.

Admittedly, this discussion of Josephus' use of *deisidaimonia* has consisted more in showing that the meaning 'religious scruple' or 'religious fear' fits each occurrence rather than showing that other translations such as 'religion' or 'piety' are not valid. This reading, however, is confirmed when Josephus' usage of *desidaimonia* is compared with his use of *eusebeia/theosebeia* and *eulabeia*. Indeed, when there is no concern to avert divine offense, Josephus invariably uses *eusebeia*.

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[228]Koet 1929:23-24 and many others.

[229]Marcus [LCL] translates *deisidaimonia* by 'religious scruples' in *Ant.* 14.228, 232, 234, 237, 240.

[230]Even if *deisidaimonia* reflects a translation of the Latin *religio,* this point is still valid since *religio* can mean religious scruple.

3.2.3.2.   *Eusebeia, theosebeia and eulabeia*

Josephus uses the word εὐσέβεια over a hundred times in his writings.[231] As Diodorus and Strabo, however, he uses it differently from *deisidaimonia*, and it never occurs in contexts where there is a concern not to offend the divinity. The word is best rendered by 'piety' and appears in the three contexts already noted earlier in this study.

Thus, in the great majority of cases, εὐσέβεια refers to the virtue of piety. Again, it is regularly coordinated with other virtues, especially righteousness (*Ant.* 6.265; 8.121). Εὐσέβεια brings reward and fruit and makes one the friend of God (*Ant.* 5.116), but it is clear that the meaning of εὐσέβεια sometimes goes beyond a description of one's attitude to God and includes one's ethical behaviour towards human beings more broadly (e.g. *Ant.* 5.327). This is unsurprising in a Jewish context where proper attitude towards God includes keeping the commands of the law (*Ant.* 8.208). Correspondingly, εὐσέβεια is not only the antithesis of impiety but also of wickedness (cf. *Ant.* 6:127: πονηρίας).

Second, εὐσέβεια is used to refer to the set of cultic practices or religious attitudes related to a particular cult, such as the proper way to worship Yahweh (e.g. *Ant.* 4:31; *War* 7:430). In this case, it can be translated by 'worship' or 'cult,' and is sometimes coordinated with the word θρησκεία (*Ant.* 6.90). In some cases, it comes very close to the usage of 'religion' in English. For example, Josephus writes that 'the rewards of fighting are the freedom of your country, your laws and your religion' [ἐλευθερίας πατρίδος νόμων εὐσεβείας] (*Ant.* 12. 304; cf. *Ant.* 13:243; *C. Ap.* 1.224). Finally, εὐσέβεια is also used to refer to piety towards other human beings, most specifically towards parents (*War* 1:630, 633) but also towards kings (*Ant.* 7.269).

Josephus uses εὐλάβεια five times, but it always means 'fear' and is used to refer to the fear of being the object of *human* violence, either as a form of retribution or punishment (*Ant.* 6.78; 11.239; 12.255; 12.278) or a form of slavery (e.g. monarchy—*War* 4.393).

3.2.3.3.   *Conclusion*

Three remarks on Josephus' usage can be made in conclusion. First, like Diodorus and Strabo, in the great majority of cases Josephus uses *deisidaimonia* and *eusebeia* in different contexts. *Deisidaimonia* occurs when there is anxiety about offending or having offended the gods, which in Josephus' corpus regularly occurs in relation to breaches of the Jewish law. On the other hand, *eusebeia* refers to the virtue of piety, a particular worship or cult, or piety towards human beings. Of course, as has been observed in other authors, some contexts would be suitable for either *deisidaimonia* or *eusebeia*, depending upon the nuance the author wishes to give to the event. This is particularly the case in the context of potential sacrilege, for example when a suppliant seeking refuge to an altar is hoping to be

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[231]He also uses εὐσεβής 34x. He does not use θεοσέβεια, but uses θεοσεβής 6x, in contexts similar to those of εὐσεβής.

secure because of the king's piety (*Ant*. 8.13), or when Pilate does not touch any of the treasures of the temple on account of his piety (*Ant*. 14.72). In those cases, Josephus uses *eusebeia* because he wants to emphasize the virtue of the king and Pilate, rather than their concern not to offend the divinity and risk retribution.

Second, it is worth noting that this distinction is valid even in the mouth of foreigners or Roman official documents in Josephus' corpus. Indeed, it is sometimes argued that *deisidaimonia* is simply the way Greeks and Romans would have talked about the religion of other people. This, however, is inaccurate as far as Josephus is concerned. The Roman official documents quoted do not all use the word *deisidaimonia* when they talk about Jewish practices. Rather it is again the context at hand and whether there is a concern about divine hostility which determines whether the word used is *deisidaimonia* or *eusebeia*. Thus, as mentioned above, when the decree of Lentulus exempts the Jews from military service, it does so on account of their *deisidaimonia*, i.e. their religious scruples. But when Julius Antonius the proconsul sends a letter to the magistrates and people of Ephesus to transmit Cesar's directive that the Jews are permitted to follow their own laws and custom and to bring to Jerusalem the offerings which they make out of their free will and out of piety, he uses *eusebeia* (ἐκ τῆς ἰδίας προαιρέσεως εὐσεβείας ἕνεκα τῆς πρὸς τὸ θεῖον, *Ant*. 16.172).

Finally, *deisidaimonia* is the object of criticism only once, when Agatharchides of Cnidus reproaches the Jews for having lost their freedom because of their *deisidaimonia*. This, however, should not be explained away as reflecting Josephus' use of another source.[232] Rather, the word still means exactly the same as elsewhere, namely 'fear of the gods.'

3.3.   The use of *deisidaimonia* in Plutarch of Chaeronea (c. 45 CE – before 125)

The biographer and moral philosopher Plutarch of Chaeronea is treated in a different section from the other authors not only because he has clear philosophical commitments to Platonism, but also because he uses the terminology of *deisidaimonia* extensively—127 times—in a notably varied corpus.[233] Plutarch's use of *deisidaimonia* and its relation with his religious thought, however, has been the object of much discussion in scholarship.

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[232]So Koet 1929:66.

[233]On Plutarch's Platonism, see Russell 2001:63-83; Dillon 2014.

3.3.1. Plutarch's *De superstitione* and his religious thought

Plutarch is the author of the only extant treatise on *deisidaimonia* which survives from antiquity.[234] His use of the terminology, however, is by far not limited to this work.[235] A TLG search on Plutarch's corpus retrieves 102 occurrences of δεισιδαιμονία and 25 occurrences of δεισιδαίμων. Among these, 25 occurrences of the noun and 21 occurrences of the adjective appear in his treatise on the subject, *De Superstitione.* Plutarch's criticism of *deisidaimonia* in this treatise, however, has been a longstanding puzzle in scholarship.

Indeed, the religious views of this treatise have often seemed at odds with Plutarch's views elsewhere, for in his denunciation of *deisidaimonia* Plutarch seems to criticize and ridicule beliefs and behaviours which he endorses elsewhere in his writings, such as belief in post-mortem punishment, oracles, omen and dreams.[236] To explain such differences, scholars have sometimes appealed to source criticism or to the rhetorical purpose of the treatise.[237] Most often, however, this discrepancy has been thought to reflect an evolution in Plutarch's thought, the moralist having moved from the 'rationalistic scepticism' of his youth to a more 'religious' and mystical outlook in his later years which coincided with his work as a priest in Delphi.[238] *De superstitione* is thus usually classified as a work of Plutarch's youth, whereas the *Lives* or *De Iside et Osiride* are later works.

While this view has gained the support of many scholars, it has not gone unchallenged. Morton Smith argued that the difference between *De superstitione* and Plutarch's other works is too great and challenged the assumption that Plutarch was the author of the treatise.[239] Taking the opposite view, Erbse and Brenk have contended that differences between *De superstitione* and other works have been exaggerated and emphasized the continuity between them. Erbse showed that many statements about

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[234]Smith 1975 is one of the rare scholars who rejects Plutarch's authorship of this treatise. For a recent edition and commentary, cf. Görgemanns 2003.

[235]On Plutarch's use of *deisidaimonia*, see Koet 1929:68-83; Erbse 1952; Moellering 1963; Smith 1975:1-35; Pérez Jiménez 1996:195-225; Lozza 1996:389-94; Baldassarri 1996:373-387; Klauck 1997:111-26; Gray 2004:51-108; Martin 2004:93-108; Bowden 2008:56-71; Van Nuffelen 2011:48-71 and 157-175.

[236]The main differences which are usually pointed out in the treatise are: the judgment that *deisidaimonia* is worse than atheism whereas elsewhere he argues the opposite; his affirmation that gods and demons are good, whereas elsewhere he endorses the existence of evil demons; his rejection of afterlife punishment, which he endorses elsewhere. They are listed in Mollering 1963:106-147; Smith 1975:3-4; Brenk 1977:9-15. Gray (2004:84) adds: 'Plutarch also ridicules a number of popular practices in the essay on superstition that, in other writings, he endorses. Throughout the *Lives* he reports without embarrassment numerous omens and dreams, and describes without condemnation various superstitious actions taken by his heroes.'

[237]For an overview of those different explanations, cf. Brenk 1977:10-155. See Attridge 1978:76, for an emphasis on the rhetorical nature of the treatise.

[238]Hirzel 1912:8-10; Koet 1929:79; Moellering 1963:18-20; Babut 1969.

[239]Smith 1975.

deisidaimonia found in the treatise are paralleled in his other works, and that his understanding and criticism of *deisidaimonia* can be found throughout his writings.[240] Likewise, Brenk argued that 'mystical tendencies' or 'superstitions' are found throughout his corpus, and not just in later writings. He also contended that criticism of punishment in the afterlife can be found in later writings. More recently, Opsomer has rejected the evolutionary interpretation of Plutarch's thought on the ground that scepticism and religion often coexisted in the New Academy and were by no means opposed to each other, despite what has been assumed in much past scholarship.[241]

Despite those contributions, however, it is still a common view that there are tensions between this treatise and the rest of Plutarch's work, and that such tensions are reflective either of an evolution in Plutarch's thinking, or of Plutarch's continuous grappling with conflicting loyalties between religion and philosophy.[242] For example, Martin argues that Brenk underestimates the 'contradictions' in Plutarch, and contends that they reflect the influence of popular beliefs upon the philosopher and his difficulty in holding to strict philosophical 'orthodoxy.'[243]

This section suggests that the reconsideration of the meaning of *deisidaimonia* as advocated in this chapter significantly reduces the contradictions and tensions which have been identified in Plutarch's corpus. As in the previous section, it analyses the way Plutarch uses *deisidaimonia* and the related words *eusebeia* and *eulabeia* throughout his writings, while also paying particular attention whether this terminology is used differently in the treatise *De superstitione* and in his other works.

3.3.2. Plutarch's use of *deisidaimonia*, *eusebeia* and *eulabeia*

3.3.2.1. *Deisidaimonia*

As seen earlier, Plutarch defines *deisidaimonia* as a type of fear (*Superst*. 165D; *Suav. viv*. 1101D9) or 'an emotional opinion and an assumption productive of a fear' (*Superst*. 165BC). Although some contexts provide little or no clue as to the semantics of *deisidaimonia*, the evidence suggests that Plutarch uses the terminology consistently with his own definition throughout his corpus. Indeed, in the great majority of cases, the biographer uses *deisidaimonia* in contexts in which—like in the authors examined so far—there is an anxiety about a possible negative or hostile divine intervention. Thus, the terminology appears in the same two types of circumstances identified in Diodorus. In addition, the word occurs in a third new context. Importantly for our purposes, as can be seen by the examples provided in parentheses below, the terminology occurs in exactly the same contexts both in Plutarch's treatise *De Superstitione* and in his other works.

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[240]For example, the statement that *deisidaimonia* is as bad as atheism (*Is.Os*.11), or the example of the Jews refusing to fight on the Sabbath because of their *deisidaimonia* (*Mor*. 1051E).

[241]Opsomer 1996:175-176.

[242]Van Nuffelen 2011a:48.

[243]Martin 2004:107-108.

First, *deisidaimonia* occurs when people are anxious about having breached a sacred law, or divine will. Thus, people are filled with *deisidaimonia* when there is a fear of committing sacrilege (*Rom* 11.5.3; *Superst.* 169C) or of being tainted by pollution, a common example being the pollution coming from corpses (*Arat.* 53.2.3; *Superst.* 170B). It also results from improperly performed rituals (*Quaest. rom* 277F4), or ill-omened days (*Cam.* 19.8.4). More broadly, *deisidaimonia* fills the person who has acted wickedly and is itself considered a divine punishment under the form of a tortured conscience and terrors (*Sera* 555A3; *Superst.*168C).

In the second category, *deisidaimonia* is associated with events interpreted as signs of divine displeasure or wrath, such as calamities like death, sickness, unfruitfulness, barrenness (e.g., *Rom* 24.2.1, *Superst.* 168BC) or strange natural phenomena (e.g., rain of blood—*Rom* 24.2.1; eclipses—*Nic.* 23.1.4; *Superst.* 169A; premature or imperfect offspring—*Publ.* 21.2.1). Finally, people may also be filled with *deisidaimonia* because of apparitions or voices from the gods (*Num.* 8.3.9), dreams (*Superst.* 165EF), oracles or dreadful curses (*Crass.* 16.6.7). Unsurprisingly, then, in Plutarch as well, *deisidaimonia* is used to manipulate people (*Lys.* 25.2.4), or leads to measures taken for expiation such as sacrifices or festivals (*Sol.* 12.6.1).

In addition to those already familiar contexts, *deisidaimonia* occurs in a third set of passages in Plutarch's *Moralia*, namely in ethical discussions. In those cases, *deisidaimonia* appears most often in lists or discussion of vices or disorders (e.g. *Adol. poet. aud*. 34E6; *Rect. rat. aud.* 43D11). Those passages contain little contextual indication as to the actual meaning of the word, although it is clearly negatively connoted.

Moving to the connotation of *deisidaimonia*, like the other authors examined, Plutarch often uses *deisidaimonia* without authorial comment or explicit (positive or negative) connotation. The word is simply used descriptively, referring to the fear of hostile divine activity (e.g. *Apoph. lac*. 238D1). At the same time, it is also often clear that *deisidaimonia* is something negative for Plutarch. This is the case for the great majority of cases in the *Moralia*, but also in some cases in the *Lives*. This negative assessment is most obvious when *deisidaimonia* appears in lists of vices, or when Plutarch describes the deleterious effects of *deisidaimonia*.

3.2.2.2. Eusebeia

Turning to Plutarch's use of εὐσέβεια (30x) and εὐσεβής (11x), the pattern is similar to what has been observed in other authors, and again the three contexts associated with this terminology elsewhere reappear.[244] First, *eusebeia* is a virtue (*Comp. Lyc. Num.* 1.1.5). It brings rewards from the gods, even in the afterlife (*Cons. Apoll.* 120B4). It is frequently opposed to *deisidaimonia* (*Num.* 22.7.10; *Per.* 6.1), or said to lie between the two extremes vices of *deisidaimonia* and atheism (*Superst.* 171F5).

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[244]Plutarch only uses θεοσέβεια once in a fragment (Frag. 67.2) and θεοσβής once (*Rom.* 22.1) in a way similar to εὐσέβεια/εὐσεβής.

Second, *eusebeia* refers to a specific set of worship practices, being used with the meaning of worship or cult (*Num*.14.2.9). As such it comes close to the meaning of 'religion' (cf. *Superst*. 166B7: τὸ θεῖον καὶ πάτριον ἀξίωμα τῆς εὐσεβείας—the divine and ancestral dignity of our religion). Finally, *eusebeia* can be manifested towards human beings (*Cons. Apoll.* 108F8).

3.2.2.3. *Eulabeia*

Plutarch uses εὐλάβεια 82 times and εὐλαβής 16 times. In most cases, *eulabeia* seems to include an idea of 'restraint.' *Eulabeia* is used most often in non-religious contexts, but there are a few examples where the situation is connected with the gods.

In religious contexts, *eulabeia* often has the nuance of restraint or caution. Thus, people are to speak about the gods 'with *eulabeia*' because we do not know much about them (*Sera* 549E). People are also encouraged to believe in some stories, such as reports about moving statues (*Cam.* 6.6), with caution or with restraint. Sometimes, however, the nuance is more likely 'deference.' Thus, the Egyptians talk about their gods in some indirect ways because of their deference or restraint towards them (*Is. Os*. 354E). Numa legislates so that people stop their activities and show deference to the sacred procession (*Cor.* 25.2). Albinus takes his wife and children and lets the virgins and sacred objects sit on his wagon out of deference for the divinity (*Cam.* 21.3.1). In all those examples, there is still an idea of 'restraint' or 'self-restraint' in order to show deference to the divinity.

In a very few cases, however, the idea of restraint is difficult to discern and the nuance seems to be rather on 'cautiousness' in the sense of 'scrupulosity.' Thus, the Romans repeat their rituals several times if they are not performed appropriately because of their *eulabeia* (*Cor.* 25.3).

3.3.3. Plutarch's use of *deisidaimonia* in *De superstitione* and his religious thought

As highlighted by this analysis, in the great majority of cases *deisidaimonia* in Plutarch can be translated as 'fear of the gods' or 'anxiety not to offend the gods.' It thus refers to a disposition towards the gods, an emotion of fear or anxiety towards them, as Plutarch himself defines it. In a few cases, however, *deisidaimonia* is used to refer to the *practice* engendered by 'the fear of the gods,' whose purpose is to placate the divinities. This is the case for example in *Quaest. Rom*. 272B9, where Plutarch explains that in ancient days the barbarians used to throw Greeks into the river to kill them, but later Hercules put an end to their murder of strangers and taught them instead to throw figures into the river 'in imitation of their *deisidaimonia*' (τὴν δεισιδαιμονίαν ἀπομιμουμένους). Such occurrences, however, remain relatively rare.

Importantly, understanding *deisidaimonia* as 'fear of the gods or of divine hostility' and not, as many scholars have assumed, as a reference to certain practices and beliefs the philosopher is critical of, greatly diminishes the tensions which have been identified between Plutarch's *De superstitione* and his other works. Indeed, what Plutarch condemns and denounces in *De superstitione* is not so much specific behaviours or beliefs, but a fear which is caused by a wrong opinion about the gods and

is debilitating for humans and impious towards the gods.[245] More precisely, as he explains in his treatise, *deisidaimonia* is a fear created by the mistaken belief that the gods harm human beings.

> But *deisidaimonia*, as the appellation also indicates, is an emotional opinion and an assumption productive of a fear which utterly humbles and crushes man, for he thinks that there are gods, but that they are causing pain and harmful. (*Superst.* 165BC [MC])

It was indeed a central belief among Platonists that the gods/god can only be good and benevolent, and therefore cannot harm.[246] For Plutarch, then, the fear of the gods (*deisidaimonia*) is based on a mistaken understanding of the gods' nature, and has disastrous consequences for humanity. To highlight the perverted effect of this fear upon human beings, the treatise describes at length the effects and practices to which it leads. But *De superstitione* does not aim to denounce, for example, belief in post-mortem judgment or in omens; rather, it shows how, *when a person has a wrong opinion about the gods and fears them*, such beliefs become terrifying and enslave human beings.[247] The criticism centres on the fear produced by such mistaken conception of the gods, mainly because it is based on a theological mistake – i.e. the belief that the gods are evil and harmful – but also because it makes human beings live in state of permanent 'terror' and leads to practices and beliefs which are exaggerated, unworthy of the gods and ridiculous or self-harming for human beings.

The question of the consistency or evolution of Plutarch's religious thought in his works cannot, of course, be solved only by the examination of his usage of *deisidaimonia*. But this analysis shows that his usage of *deisidaimonia* cannot be used to support a claim of inconsistency or evolution. Not only does Plutarch use *deisidaimonia* consistently through his corpus, but his criticism of *deisidaimonia* must be understood as centring on the fear of divine harm, and not on traditional cultic practices or beliefs as such.

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[245]Contra Martin (2004:94), who argues that in *Superst.* 'Plutarch mocks—no doubt with no small amount of exaggeration—many of the same sort of behavior: consulting witches, attempting to purify oneself by magic or bathing in the sea, squatting all day on the ground.'

[246]The theological underpinnings of the philosophers' criticism of *deisidaimonia* is discussed in detail in chapter four.

[247]Brenk (1977:16) hints at this nuance in his study: 'The first impression one might get is that this is an all-out attack on the belief in the power of dreams and oneiromancy. However, it must be noted that Plutarch is always thinking in terms of the superstitious, and never explicitly attacks the belief in dreams on general philosophical principles. No mention is made of the validity of dreams coming to normal, tranquil mortals.'

3.4. Conclusion

3.4.1. The use of *deisidaimonia* between the 1st c. BCE and the early 2nd c. CE

Due to its limited focus on four authors, the conclusions of this chapter must remain tentative. But a consistent pattern can be discerned in the way the four authors examined in this chapter use *deisidaimonia*. Four remarks can be made here.

First, throughout the corpus examined, *deisidaimonia* almost always has the meaning given by ancient definitions, namely 'fear of the divine.' It thus refers in the great majority of cases to an *emotion* or a *disposition of fear* of incurring divine hostility or retribution. In a few instances, however, *deisidaimonia* refers by metonymy to the *action* which, motivated by anxiety, aims to avert this divine hostility. It thus describes an apotropaic activity. This usage, however, remains limited in our corpus.[248]

Second, and as a confirmation of this first point, *eusebeia* and *deisidaimonia* are not synonymous, and are used in different contexts in all the authors examined—with the exception of the few contexts in which either word and nuance would be possible. Thus, *deisidaimonia* occurs in contexts where there is an anxiety not to be the object of a divinity's hostility. It typically occurs when particular events, such as omen, special phenomena, or hostile circumstances could be interpreted as signs of divine displeasure. Or when human beings commit transgression which might lead to divine hostility, such as pollution, wicked deeds, sacrileges, or law infringement. In several cases, it comes thus very close to what we would call in modern English a 'bad or troubled conscience' or 'guilt.'[249] On the other hand, *eusebeia* is used to describe piety towards the gods, the cult of the gods, or piety towards human beings.

Third, moving to the issue of connotation, in an important number of instances, *deisidaimonia* is not obviously used pejoratively or positively. Rather, *deisidaimonia* is often used simply descriptively, to refer to the fearful or anxious attitude of people when there is a possibility to offend or have offended the gods. Furthermore, in the *corpora* at hand, the word is *never* used as a term of praise or to refer to a virtue. Rather, it is *eusebeia* and *eusebes* which describe the virtuous attitude towards the gods which leads to their favour. Sometimes, however, *deisidaimonia* is clearly negatively connoted, becoming the object of criticism, and a philosopher like Plutarch often identifies it as a vice, in fact as the opposite of piety.

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[248]It is noteworthy that the noun δεισιδαιμονία occurs almost always in the singular in the texts analysed in this chapter. I have found only seven cases where it is in the plural form: Josephus, *Ant.* 19.290; Plutarch, *Aem.* 1.5; *Conj. praec.*140D8; *Superst.* 168F6; *An vit.* 500A; *Sera* 555A3; *Lat. viv.* 1128D8. This corroborates the conclusion that the word is used to refer to an emotion rather than to practices or beliefs.

[249]Moellering 1963:75.

Finally, it is noteworthy that there is no notable difference in the use of *deisidaimonia* and *eusebeia* between non-philosophical or philosophical writings. Both Plutarch and the other authors examined use *deisidaimonia* as a reference to the fear or anxiety towards the gods' hostility and use it in similar contexts. The only significant difference lies in Plutarch's use of *deisidaimonia* in an additional context specific to his didactic works, namely where *deisidaimonia* is identified as a vice and impiety, and can be explained by his particular theology.[250]

3.4.2. *Deisidaimonia* and the grammar of Graeco-Roman religion

As highlighted by this chapter, *deisidaimonia* is often used simply descriptively especially in narrative material. This can be explained by the nature of Greek religion. Indeed, unlike many modern religions, ancient religion was not characterized by belief in specific doctrines, but aimed to maintain the *pax deorum,* i.e. peace with the gods who could be either friends or enemies. As Davies writes:

> Roman religion was profoundly unlike modern monotheistic religions, and brief accounts tend to mystify rather than explain. We tend to talk now of 'civic paganism' whereby citizens would participate in festivals that centered on gaining the gods' goodwill (the *pax deum*) through sacrifice and ritual. Failure to obtain the support of the gods before any venture would lead to disastrous results. If the gods were displeased, they would send signs (omens, prodigies) of their opposition (the *ira deum*), and they could usually be placated by appropriate sacrifice to restore the *pax deum*.[251]

It is within this particular grammar of ancient religion, that *deisidaimonia* as both common and yet undesirable makes sense. As Baroja writes concerning *superstitio*:

> […] notas que afectan a algo muy importante y difícil de comprender para una mente moderna, sea religiosa o sea laica. Me refiero a la idea de que entro los hombres y los dioses puede haber

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[250]Although this cannot be detailed here, those conclusions have been tested and prove valid also for the use of *deisidaimonia* and *eusebeia* in Polybius (c. 203–120 BCE) and Dio Chrysostom (c. 40—c. 120 CE). Polybius uses δεισιδαιμονία or δεισιδαιμονέω four times, always with the meaning of 'fear of the gods,' 'religious scruples' (6.56.8; 12.24.5; 9.19.1; 10.2.9), and εὐσέβεια four times to refer to piety or reverence towards the gods (4.20.2; 5.10.6; 5.12.1; 16.12.9). Chrysostom uses δεισιδαιμονία only once with the meaning of religious fear or religious scruple (61.9); he uses εὐσέβεια and εὐσεβής five times with the meaning of piety or reverence towards the gods (12.48.5; 13.35.5; 31.146.7; 32.5.2; 75.5.3) and twice to refer to piety towards human beings (77/78.30.1; fragment 6). Philo, however, often seems to use *deisidaimonia* without the nuance of fear, to refer to perverted piety.

[251]Davies 2009:168–9.

relaciones de *amistad* o de *enemistad*: la simpatía juega también entre ellos, como entre los cuerpos animados o inanimados, un papel decisivo.[252]

Deisidaimonia thus refers to the concern or fear—admittedly with different degrees of anxiety—of having made the gods enemies and thus incurring their hostility, wrath and retribution. This particular nature of Greek religion explains why Plutarch can say that the majority of people feel *deisidaimonia* towards the gods, and yet that those same people also experience hope and even joy in expecting help from them (*Suav. viv.* 1101DE). It also explains why ancient authors often do not comment on it. Indeed, *deisidaimonia* is a very common phenomenon in Graeco-Roman religion, in fact, it is very much an inherent and unavoidable component in a grammar where relationship with the gods is by definition characterized by enmity or friendship.[253]

Within this particular grammar, the question of whether *deisidaimonia* can sometimes refer to a 'good' fear of the gods makes little sense. Indeed, although *deisidaimonia* is a common phenomenon and plays a role in maintaining morality in society, it is obviously never desirable on a personal level and it is the very purpose of the cult to ensure that relationship with the gods is not characterized by enmity and *deisidaimonia*, but by friendship and peace.

Moving to the issue of a translation of *deisidaimonia* then, it is misleading to render it by 'piety' or 'religion,' for those words do not convey the notion of fear in modern English conceptualities. Even the word 'god-fearing' is inappropriate to render the adjective, for it often has strong ethical connotations and usually expresses 'respect' rather than 'fear' of god.[254] Likewise, the terminology of 'superstition' does not correspond to what is understood by *deisidaimonia*.

It is thus better to attempt to define *deisidaimonia* within the grammar and with the concepts and terminology which the ancients themselves used. The ancient did not speak about 'religion' and 'superstition,' but about *deisidaimonia*, *eusebeia* and *eulabeia* when they talked about religious attitudes and behaviours. This chapter has begun to sketch the role each of these terms played in this ancient grammar, highlighting that *deisidaimonia* and *eusebeia* were used in different contexts and differently, and that the ancients drew a clear distinction between them and came to oppose them directly. It is thus best to translate *deisidaimonia* as fear of the gods' hostility or punishment, anxiety not to offend the gods, religious scruple, or, occasionally, action resulting from the fear of the gods'

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[252]Baroja 1975:155.

[253]On the importance of the fear of the gods in Greek religion, see Festugière 1946:71-82. He concludes: 'Ainsi la crainte des dieux, de leur colère à l'égard des vivants, de leur vengeance sur les morts, a-t-elle joué un grand rôle dans la religion des Grecs.' See also Grodzynski 1976:44: 'La recherche de la *pax deorum* aboutit presque inévitablement à la superstition. Celle-ci est en somme la tare habituelle de la religion païenne.'

[254]EOD defines 'god-fearing' as: 'characterized by deep respect for God; deeply or earnestly religious.' Online edition, accessed 5.08.2017.

hostility and aiming to avert it. On the other hand, εὐσεβεία roughly corresponds to 'piety, cult, worship, religious practices or religion,' and εὐσεβής to 'pious, righteous.' As this study confirms, it is εὐσεβεία rather than δεισιδαιμονία which, in some contexts at least, comes closest to what is understood by 'religion' in modern English, if religion is understood in the modern sense of a particular ensemble of beliefs and practices.

3.4.3. *Deisidaimonia* in Acts 17

Going back to Acts 17, those results have several important consequences for the translation of δεισιδαιμονέστερους and for understanding the subject of the speech in Athens.

As the analysis in this chapter suggests, it is misleading to translate δεισιδαιμονέστερους as 'very pious' or 'very religious,' as most translations do. To convey the positive nuance of piety, Luke would have used εὐσεβής or θεοσεβής. Indeed, it is those latter adjectives which are used by other ancient authors when they emphasize the well-known piety of the Athenians. Thus, Josephus points out that 'all claim that the Athenians are the most pious (εὐσεβεστάτους) of the Greeks' (*Ap*.2.130), an assessment found also in Sophocles (*Oed. Col*. 260: θεοσεβεστάτας) and Pausanias (1.17.1: θεοὺς εὐσεβοῦσιν ἄλλων πλέον).

In light of this chapter's analysis then, δεισιδαιμονέστερους is best rendered by 'very anxious about averting the gods' hostility' or 'very concerned about keeping peace with the gods.' This meaning fits well with the context of Acts 17. Indeed, the Athenians are described as δεισιδαιμονεστέρους because (γάρ) they have even (καί) built 'an altar to an unknown god' (17:22-23). The existence of altars to unknown gods in Athens is attested in Pausanias. The most likely background of such altars is that they were built out of the concern not to overlook any god and to make sure that no god is offended.[255] They thus reflect an attempt either to atone for some sin or satisfy an angry divinity—or to prevent such a divine revenge by making sure that all divinities receive their share of honour. Furthermore, this fits well the description of the city of Athens as κατείδωλον—'full of idols' (16). The construction of an altar even to an 'unknown god' in a city full of idols shows that the Athenians are indeed δεισιδαιμονεστέρους, namely they are very anxious about not being the object of divine hostility, going even to the extent of building an altar to an unknown god who could have been overlooked and thus offended.

Importantly, then, the speech uses as its starting point a characterization which points to the Athenians' anxiety or concern to avert divine wrath and hostility and maintain peace with the gods. As several scholars have noted, however, the philosophers were among the major critics of *deisidaimonia* in the ancient world. The next chapter thus examines the philosophical discussion of *deisidaimonia*.

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[255]Horst 1990:1451; cf. Klauck 2000:82-83; Dibelius 1939:39-40; Marguerat 2015:157.

CHAPTER FOUR: DEISIDAIMONIA, PIETY AND THE GODS IN DEBATE – Polemics between Epicurean and Stoic philosophers around the first century CE

As several scholars commenting on Acts 17 have noted, *deisidaimonia* was a common object of criticism by the philosophers, especially the Epicureans, one of the two philosophical sects described as interacting with Paul in Acts 17:18.[256] Those comments, however, are usually made with the assumption that the philosophical criticism of *deisidaimonia* took the form of a denunciation of 'superstitious' religious beliefs or behaviours, such as the cult of statues.[257] As the preceding chapter has began to suggest, however, among non-philosophical authors and Plutarch, *deisidaimonia* did not refer to superstitious popular religious practices or beliefs, but to the fear of divine hostility or to practices or beliefs reflecting such fears and seeking to placate the gods.

The present chapter continues the examination of *deisidaimonia,* but this time more specifically in connection with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers and their teaching about piety and attitude towards traditional worship. Although there is a significant amount of literature on the attitude of ancient philosophical schools towards religion, there has been little detailed discussion of the philosophical criticism of *deisidaimonia* specifically.[258] Martin's book *Inventing Superstition* (2004) is one of the few contributions which treats this topic at greater length. Before him, Grodzynski's very influential study (1976) on the Latin term *superstitio* also devotes a few paragraphs to discussing the use of *superstitio* among Latin philosophers. And Plutarch's understanding of *deisidaimonia* has, of course, been the object of detailed study.[259] But both Martin and Grodzynski's works are diachronic studies covering several centuries, and therefore do not discuss in detail the passages involving the terminology of *deisidaimonia* or *superstitio* in philosophical works.

Furthermore, to my knowledge, apart from the particular case of Plutarch, no study has examined in detail how the criticism of *deisidaimonia* by Hellenistic philosophers—especially the Epicureans and the Stoics—related to their attitude towards traditional religion and their teaching on true piety. The assumption is still often that the criticism of *deisidaimonia* is the same as the criticism of popular religious practices and beliefs. This is an important methodological weakness of Martin's study. Indeed, Martin includes the discussion of authors who criticise popular beliefs and practices but never actually use the terminology of *deisidaimonia* or *superstitio*. This is even more problematic in

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[256]Barrett 1974:74; Jipp 2012:576-577.

[257]Barrett 1974:74-75; Jipp 2012:577, 580-81.

[258]On the philosophical criticism of 'religion' in antiquity, see Decharme 1904; Attridge 1978; Babut 1974; Algra 2009.

[259]Most recently, see especially Van Nuffelen 2011a and 2011b. cf. also Gray 2004.

light of Martin's neglect of the study of many contemporary authors who *do* use the terminology of *deisidaimonia* or *superstitio*. As Gordon puts it:

> M. has rightly refused to write an exclusively semantic study in the manner of Koets; but in reaction he has gone to the opposite extreme. There is for example no discussion of the use of *deisidaimōn/deisidaimonia/deisidaimonein* in Julio-Claudian Greek prose authors, in Josephus or the Second Sophistic (Lucian alone is mentioned—once). On the other hand, in view of M.'s initial problematic, what are we to make of the fact that Celsus, so far as we know, did not use the term at all in his attack on Christianity? As a result, the focus blurs: the imperial/Christian chapters—more than half the book—discuss not superstition but all manner of critique of 'popular belief'. Are these terms truly synonyms?[260]

By choosing not to focus on the use of the word *deisidaimonia* or *superstitio* in the literature and instead including other texts which simply criticize popular beliefs, Martin's study runs the risk of presenting a *scholarly construct* of 'superstition' in the ancient world, rather than what ancient philosophers understood as *deisidaimonia*.

The present chapter thus contributes to filling a gap in scholarship. The chapter first discusses the Epicurean and then the Stoic position, describing what they denounced as *deisidaimonia* and why, and what they taught as proper piety towards the divine. The conclusion then synthesizes those results with those of the last chapter and previous studies. More particularly for the purpose of our larger project, by examining the criticism of *deisidaimonia* by Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in connection with their teaching on proper piety and their attitudes towards the cult, this chapter seeks to map out the philosophical debate which forms the background conversation of the speech according to the narrative of Acts 17:16-17.

A final remark with respect to the sources used in this chapter is in order. Because of the time frame chosen (2nd c. BCE–early 2nd CE), it has been necessary to include Latin sources in the analysis. Indeed, especially in the case of the Stoics, because Epictetus (55–135 CE) does not use the word δεισιδαιμονία, nor treat the subject of the 'fear of the gods' otherwise, our main sources are Seneca (c. 4 BCE–65 CE) and Cicero (106–43 BCE). Likewise, although our main source for the Epicureans is Philodemus (c. 110–c.40/early 30s BCE), Lucretius (c. 95–55 BCE) also provides important evidence of the philosophical conversation during this period. In those cases, the analysis has focused on the terminology of *superstitio* or, in the case of Lucretius, on *religio*. Although it has been shown that the semantic range and connotations of *superstitio* and δεισιδαιμονία do not always overlap, several

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[260]Gordon 2006:524.

scholars note that Latin philosophers use *superstitio* or *religio* to refer to what the Greek philosophers described as δεισιδαιμονια.[261] It shall become clear that it is the case in the texts examined below.

4.1. The Epicureans on *deisidaimonia*, the gods, and piety

4.1.1. *Deisidaimonia* and piety in Epicurean philosophy

4.1.1.1. *The Epicurean critique of deisidaimonia*

The terminology of δεισιδαιμονία (or δεισιδαίμων and δεισιδαιμονέω) does not occur in Epicurus (341–270 BCE), and it occurs only once or possibly twice in Philodemus' extent works, in contexts which do not give much information about its meaning.[262] Plutarch, however, uses δεισιδαιμονία when he concedes that Epicurean doctrine is successful in 'eliminating a certain fear and *deisidaimonia*' (ὁ λόγος αὐτῶν φόβον ἀφαιρεῖ τινα καὶ δεισιδαιμονίαν—*Suav. viv.* 1100F). Likewise, in Cicero's *De natura deorum*, *superstitio* refers to what Epicurean doctrine strives to eliminate (1.42.117).[263] The terms δεισιδαιμονία and *superstitio* were thus used during our time frame to refer to what Epicurean doctrine strived above all to set humanity free from, namely 'the fear of the gods.'

As is well-known, the Epicureans defined the human *telos* as 'pleasure,' a state which, according to Epicurus, was characterized by 'the absence of pain in the body and trouble in the soul' (*Ep. Men.*).[264] They identified the two most serious causes of disturbance to the soul as the fear of the gods and the fear of death.

> In addition to all these we must recognize that the most powerful disturbance in human souls arises when they believe that these [the heavenly bodies] are blessed and immortal, and have at the same time intentions and actions and causes inconsistent with this. It also arises when they expect some everlasting evil either because of the myths or because they fear the very absence of sensation in death (as if that was something to us). (*Ep. Hdt*. 81 [MC])

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[261]Grodzynski 1976:42; Gordon 2008:74. Grodzynski notes that the Latin philosophers Varro, Lucretius, Cicero and Seneca understand *superstitio* like the Greek philosophers understand δεισιδαιμονία, namely with the meaning 'fear before the divine.' On the differences between *deisidaimonia* and *superstitio*, see Gray 2004:36-51; Martin 2004:125-139.

[262]Obbink 1996:484. The occurrences in Philodemus are in *Piet.* 1135-6, and, if he is also the author of *P. Herc*. 1251, in col. 10, 12-15. *P. Herc. 1251* is published as Philodemus' *On Choices and Avoidances* in Indelli and Tsouna-McKirahan 1995.

[263]Cf. *ND* 1.45.11.

[264]Translations of Epicurus' works are my own and based on Diogenes Laertius X, LCL edition.

For the Epicureans, fear of the gods is generated by wrong beliefs about them, and more specifically by attributing to them intentions and actions inconsistent with their blessedness and immortality. By this, they meant the belief that the gods are mindful of human affairs and interfere in the world. It is this mistaken notion of the gods as concerned with the world and active in it, which causes fear of the gods, since it opens up the possibility that the gods might harm.

More precisely, Epicurean literature identifies several important sources generative of fear and terror of the gods in human experience. As highlighted by *Ep. Hdt*. 81, one of them was the attribution of divine nature to celestial bodies or, more generally, the attribution of natural phenomena to divine causation. Epicurean philosophy thus emphasized the importance of the study of nature and especially the study of the causes of natural phenomena so as to show that they have nothing to do with the gods.[265] This lay at the heart of the project undertaken by Lucretius in *De rerum natura* (1.146-158).

Other important sources of fear of the gods identified by the Epicureans were dreams (Lucretius 1.104-106; Philodemus, *Dis*), or the utterances of priests [*vatum*] (Lucretius 1.102-111). Furthermore, and importantly, the Epicureans also identified a close connection between the fear of the gods and the fear of death.[266] On the one hand, the fear of death was enhanced by the fear of the gods' punishment after death. This is what is alluded to in *Ep. Hdt*. 81 above, which mentions the mythological stories speaking of divine punishment and retribution after death.[267] On the other hand, misunderstanding of the nature of death and the afterlife increased the fear of the gods during lifetime. Lucretius makes this association at the beginning of book 1, where he points out that mistaken understandings about the nature of the soul as surviving in the afterlife leaves humanity without any strength to defy *religio* – religious scruple – because of the fear of everlasting punishment (1.102-116).[268]

The contexts leading to the fear of the gods identified by the Epicureans are thus very similar to those which have been identified as leading to *deisidaimonia* in the previous chapter, including unexplained natural phenomena, oracles and dreams which might be interpreted as signs of divine

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[265]Cf. Plutarch, *Suav. viv*. 1092B.

[266]Cf. Warren 2009:236-237.

[267]cf. Plutarch *Suav. viv*. 1092AB.

[268]Lucretius does not use *superstitio* but *religio*, in the sense of 'religious scruple,' to refer to what Epicurus strives to eliminate. This was the original sense of *religio* and is still well attested at that time, occuring, for example, in Cicero (*ND* 2.10) and Livius (9.29.10). Beveniste (1969:270) defines it as follows: 'Au total la *religio* est une hésitation qui retient, un scrupule qui empêche, et non un sentiment qui dirige vers un action, ou qui incite à pratiquer le culte.' See more fully Beveniste 1969:269-270. The noun *superstitio* appears for the first time in the first century BCE in Cicero, where it is also contrasted with *religio*. The adjective *superstitiosus*, however, occurs for the first time over a century earlier in Plautus. (cf. Janssen 1979:135; Gray 2004:37, n.11).

hostility, and the sayings of the seers. Finally, it is also associated with afterlife punishment, and here again mythology plays a key role in reinforcing this fear.

For the Epicureans, the fear of the gods was not just a threat to attaining the human *telos* of pleasure, but it was an oppressive yoke with pervasive debilitating effects upon human beings and society, and the cause of many evils. Epicureans often use the image of slavery to talk about the fear of the gods and describe the suppression of this fear as freedom. Thus, Lucretius repeatedly speaks of man being crushed by *religio*—the term he uses instead of *superstitio*—and of Epicurus as the one who sets humanity free from this yoke.[269] Both Lucretius and Velleius, the Epicurean representative in Cicero's *De natura deorum*, call gods who interfer with human affairs *taskmasters* who hold humanity in slavery.

> For if those who have rightly learned that the gods lead a life free of care nonetheless all the time wonder how things can happen, especially in those events which are discerned above our head in the regions of ether, they revert back to the old scruples [*religiones*], and adopt severe masters [*acris dominos*], whom the poor wretched believe to be almighty, ignoring what can be and what cannot be, in short, how each thing has limited power and a deep-set boundary mark. (Lucretius 5.84-90 [MC])[270]

Furthermore, *deisidaimonia* leads to impious deeds and evils. Lucretius points to the sacrifice of Iphigenia as a typical impious consequence of an attempt to avert hostile gods (Artemis), 'so potent was *religio* in persuading to evil deeds' (*tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*) (1.80-101). The Epicurean author of *P. Herc*. 1251 speaks of the misfortunes brought upon cities because of the failure to take action due to the apprehension of acting against the will of the gods (διὰ ὑποψίας τοῦ μηδὲν παρὰ τὴν τῶν θεῶν ἐνεργεῖν βούλησιν—VIII).

For the Epicureans then, *deisidaimonia* is not just a psychological sickness among others, but it is *the* central problem of humanity, with its companion the fear of death. *Deisidaimonia* leads to a form of slavery and makes human beings take destructive decisions leading to the dismise of individuals, their cities and human society at large. Furthermore, the Epicureans believed that this disease was 'widespread and tenacious' among mankind.[271] It is thus not surprising that they use soteriological categories to speak about what Epicurus and Epicurean philosophy bring to mankind.

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[269]Cf. 1.62-69.

[270]Cf. Lucretius 2.1090-92: 'If you hold fast to these convictions, nature is seen to be free at once and rid of proud masters (*superbis dominis*), herself doing all by herself of her own accord, without the help of the gods.' [LCL] Cf. *ND* 1.20.54.

[271]Warren 2009:237.

By suppressing the fear of the gods, the Epicureans saw themselves not only as healing a widespread and debilitating desease, but also as delivering mankind from the yoke of angry taskmasters.

4.1.1.2. *The nature of the gods: untouched by* gratia *or* ira

Because the Epicureans diagnosed the fear of the gods to be above all a cognitive fault of ignorance or misapprehension, they believed that its remedy laid in holding the right beliefs about the gods, and more broadly about the nature of all things. As Epicurus put it in *Ep. Men.* 123, to live the right life, one must 'exercise oneself' to hold right beliefs, and right beliefs about the gods are fundational.

> First, believe (νομίζων) that God is an immortal and blessed living being, as the common notion of a god [of mankind] indicates, bestowing upon him nothing which is foreign to his immortality or that does not agree with his blessedness. But believe about him all what can uphold his blessedness with his immortality. For there are gods; the knowledge of them is manifest; but they are not such as the multitude believe; for they do not uphold the notion which they form concerning them. (*Ep. Men.* 123; Diogenes Laertius 10.123 [MC])

Epicureans not only affirmed that the gods' existence was self-evident, but also that they were blessed and imperishable, as the common notion of god shared by all indicates. The problem was that most people held beliefs inconsistent with the gods' *blessedness and imperishability*, thus giving rise to anxiety about the gods. What this blessedness and imperishability entailed was encapsulated in the first of the *Kuriai Doxai* [*KΔ*] and often repeated in Epicurean literature.

> What is blessed and immortal neither has trouble itself nor does it bring trouble to another; *hence it is exempt from the movements of wrath and favour*, for all such movements happen in weakness. (KΔ 1; Diogenes Laertius 10.139 [MC, my emphasis])
> Τὸ μακάριον καὶ ἄφθαρτον οὔτε αὐτὸ πράγματα ἔχει οὔτε ἄλλῳ παρέχει, *ὥστε οὔτε ὀργαῖς οὔτε χάρισι συνέχεται· ἐν ἀσθενεῖ γὰρ πᾶν τὸ τοιοῦτον.*

Upholding the blessedness and imperishability of the gods means above all to reject the popular belief that *the gods can be moved by favour or anger*, for this would imply weakness. This right belief about the gods is constantly repeated in Epicurean literature. The *locus classicus* expression of this idea in Lucretius is found at the beginning of book 1.[272]

> For the very nature of divinity must of necessity enjoy immortal life with the greatest peace, far removed and separated from our affairs; for free from any pain, free from dangers, strong itself

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[272]Cf. Bailey 1947:2.603, who notes that this passage is an amplification of the first *KD*.

by its own resources, needing nothing from us (*nil indiga nostri*), it is neither bribed with rewards nor touched by wrath (*nec bene promeritis*[273] *capitur neque tangitur ira*). (1.44–48 [MC])

This passage is particularly interesting for our purposes for it echoes the affirmation in Acts 17:25 that God does not need anything. For the Epicureans, the gods are far removed from our affairs and wholly self-sufficient, because this is necessary for them to be perfectly peaceful—which is perfect happiness. This means that the gods do not need human service (*nil indiga nostri*), and that they are influenced neither by gains or rewards nor by wrath (*nec bene promeritis capitur neque tangitur ira*).[274] The same articulation of this fundamental belief is found in Velleius' mouth, just after he quotes Epicurus' first *KΔ*:

> If we were seeking nothing else besides worshipping the gods piously and be free from the fear of the divine (*superstitio*), what has been said would suffice; for the excellent nature of the gods would receive the pious worship of men, since it is both eternal and supremely blessed (for whatever is preeminent receives a just veneration); and all fear of divine power or anger would have been driven away (since it is understood that anger and favour alike are removed [*et iram et gratiam segregari*] from blessed and immortal nature, and that these being eliminated, no fear threatens from the powers above [*a superis*]). (Cicero, *ND* 1.45 [MC])

Key in those definitions of the divine is that it is 'neither held by *gratia*, nor by *ira*.' In Epicurean philosophy then, the affirmation that the gods need nothing from human beings and are wholly self-sufficient and uninvolved in human affairs is an entailment of the fact that they cannot be influenced by wrath or favour because they are in a permanent state of ataraxie. The solution of the Epicureans to *deisidaimonia* thus lies in apprehending the true nature of the gods as not touched by wrath or favour, and thus uninvolved in human affairs.

Accordingly, it was capital for Epicurean philosophers to be able to demonstrate that the gods are uninvolved in the world and not, as many believed, active in it for better or for worse. Their arguments proceeded along two lines.[275] First, they argued that belief in divine intervention presupposed that the divine could be affected in its blessedness (e.g. through anxieties or anger), or that its blessedness was contingent upon other external factors (partiality—i.e. favours). But 'occupations, anxieties, angers and favours do not accord with bliss, but those things happen in

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[273]According to Bailey (1974:2.604), this is a reference to the offerings which men make to the gods, as χάρισι in *KΔ* 1, and not, as often in Epicurus, 'gratitude.'

[274]See the same two lines in 2.646-651.

[275]Warren 2009:239-240.

weakness, fear and need of neighbours' (*Ep. Hdt.* 76-78). To believe in interventionist gods is therefore to deny the gods their majesty and what makes them gods—i.e. blessedness and immortality (cf. Lucr. *RN* 5.82-90).

The second line of argument against interventionist gods was to emphasize the faults and evils in the world, thus undermining the idea of a provident god.[276] According to Lactantius, Epicureans thus argued against the Stoic view of a benevolent and omnipotent god:

> Either god (i) wishes to prevent evils and cannot, or (ii) he can and does not want to, or (iii) he neither wants to nor can, or (iv) he both wants to and can. If (i), he is weak, which is impossible for god. If (ii), he is malevolent, which is equally alien to god. If (iii), he is malevolent and weak, so not a god. If (iv)—the only real possibility for a god—then where do evils come from? And why does he not prevent them? (Lactantius *On the anger of God* 13.19).[277]

The existence of evil and injustice thus provided the Epicureans with a strong argument against the providential gods of their philosophical rivals. This is well illustrated for example in Plutarch's *De sera,* which is an attempt to tackle the Epicurean argument against divine providence based on the delay of the divinity to punish the wicked.[278]

Epicureans thus affirmed the existence of the gods, in fact, of anthropomorphic gods, but strongly rejected divine providence and any kind of divine intervention in the world as incompatible with divine blessedness and immortality (and goodness). This belief set them up against other philosophical schools upholding providential views of god—especially the Stoics, but also the Platonists. In fact, because they defended the view of a providential god, the Stoics were accused by Epicureans of being defenders of and proponents of *deisidaimonia*! The Epicurean argument is well illustrated by Velleius' attack against Balbus' school:

> Then, in this immensity of length, breadth and height, an infinite quantity of innumerable atoms flies around, which although separated by void, yet cohere together, and clinging to each other form unions which produce the forms and shapes of things which you cannot think are able to be produced without bellows and anvils; and so you have imposed upon our necks an eternal master, whom we are to fear day and night; for who does not fear a prying and busy (*plenum negotii*) god who foresees (*providentem*), considers (*cogitantem*), and notices everything, and thinks that everything is his concern? From this first came this fated necessity of yours, which you call *heimarmenē,* so that you say that whatever happens is the result of an eternal truth and

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[276]Warren 2009:240. E.g. Lucr. *RN* 5.195-324. See also Lactantius *Inst.* 3.17.7 (370 Us.).

[277]Translation in Warren 2009:240, based on the Greek in Usener frag. 274.

[278]The treatise identifies this as the strongest argument against providence (548CD).

an unbroken continuation of causes. But what value must be assigned to a philosophy which, as old women—even ignorant old women—, thinks that everything happens by fate? Then follows your doctrine of *mantikē,* which is called divination in Latin, which would so steep us in superstition (*superstitione*) that, if we were willing to listen to you, we would have to be devoted (*nobis essent colendi*) to southsayers, augurs, oracle-mongers, seers and interpreters of dreams. But Epicurus has delivered us from these terrors and has set us free, so that we do not fear those who, we know, neither create any trouble for themselves nor seek to cause any to others, and we worship that excellent and majestic nature piously and reverently. (Cicero, *ND* 1.55-56 [MC])

This passage shows how the Stoic view of the divine was thought to lead to the fear of the gods at all corners for the Epicureans. The first part of this text, which speaks of 'bellows and anvils,' mocks the doctrine of creation of the Stoics. The Stoics believed that the world was the creation of a provident and beneficent god. The Epicureans, on the other hand, believed that everything is the product of the collision of atoms. The doctrine of creation implies a divine interest in the world which, for the Epicureans, can only lead to the fear of the gods as prying masters. Next comes the Stoic doctrine of Fate, or their view that everything which happens in the world is necessary and in accordance with god's will, and although Velleius does not spell it out, it is easy to see how this can lead to the fear of the gods since nothing can be done to avoid misfortunes or nothing *should* be done since everything which happens is the will of the gods. Finally, closely connected is the Stoic doctrine of divination, which implies that the gods' will can and must be sought, thus filling people with fear and making them the devotees of augurs and seers.

4.1.1.3.   *Epicureans on traditional religion and true piety*

Although the Epicureans criticized the fear of the gods, they were, as far as we can tell, traditional and conservative in their attitude towards the cult.[279] This is attested by both Epicurean and non-Epicurean authors, and by the fact that Epicureans were apparently never tried for or even accused of impiety outside of philosophical debates.[280] The second section of Philodemus' *De pietate* (723-1022)

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[279]On Epicurus and traditional religion, see Obbink 1996:1-23, Festugière 1946:86-92, and Attridge 1978:51-56. On Lucretius, see Summers 1995, who argues that Lucretius differs from Epicurus and Philodemus, by taking a more negative view of religion.

[280]The fact that ancient anti-Epicurean sources, while full of slander, say nothing of atheism and impiety support the view that early Epicureans were not accused on those accounts. See, for example, Diogenes Laertius' list of slanders against Epicurus in *Lives* 10.4-9. Likewise, Philodemus makes a point of emphasizing that Epicurus was never railed by his contemporaries in comedies nor prosecuted by the Athenians (*Piet.* 1505-32). See Obbink 1996:13-14.

devotes significant space to refute the charge of impiety by philosophical rivals by cataloguing instances where Epicurus and his early followers participated in cult and rituals. Specifically, the sources suggest that the Epicureans participated in most aspects of popular religion, including traditional festivals, sacrifices and prayers (e.g. Philod. *Piet.* 796, 879-82, 1850, 2278; Plut., *Suav. viv.* 1102B), the adoration of statues (e.g. Philod. *Piet.* 910-11; Cicero, *ND* 1.85[281]), or mystery initiation (Philod. *Piet.* 558-9, 808-10).[282] They did, however, criticize divination and prophecy, both of which were closely connected with belief in divine providence.[283]

While emphasizing that the gods do not *need* human worship, the Epicureans claimed that 'highest beings deserve honours' (Cicero, *ND* 1.45) and that it is 'natural' for human beings to worship and honour them.

> Let it suffice to say now that the divine needs no mark of honour, but that it is natural for us (ἡμῖν δὲ φυσικόν ἐστιν) to honour it, in particular by forming pious notions of it (ὁσίαις [ὑ]πολή[ψ]εσιν), and secondly by offering with each individual usage (i.e. as appropriate; or possibly: to each of the gods in turn) the traditional sacrifices. (Philod. *De mus.* col. 4.6 [Obbink])[284]

As suggested by this quotation, however, piety is above all expressed by having 'pious notions' about the gods, a view echoed by many other Hellenistic philosophers. From an Epicurean perspective, this meant to believe about them whatever upholds their blessedness and their immortality—namely that they are touched neither by *gratia* nor *ira*, and thus do not interfer in the world. As a consequence, Epicurus claims that 'not the one who suppresses the gods of the multitude is impious, but the one who attaches the opinions of the multitude to the gods' (*Ep. Men.* 123-124). Likewise, Philodemus writes:

> For pious is the person who preserves the immortality / and consummate blessedness of God together with all the things included by us; but impious is the person who banishes either where God is concerned. (*Piet.* Col. 39-40, 1127-46 [Obbink])

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[281]Cotta: 'I personally am acquainted with Epicureans who worship every paltry image, albeit I am aware that according to some people's view Epicurus really abolished the gods, but nominally retained them in order not to offend the people of Athens.'

[282]Obbink 1996:10. See also the reference to Epicurus' piety in Diogenes Laertius 10.10.

[283]Attridge 1978:52-55. Cf. Cic. *Div.*1.87.

[284]Obbink 1996:391.

Furthermore, the Epicureans drew a close connection between this definition of the gods and their ethical *telos*, and this relationship is reflected in their understanding of piety as well. Indeed, to be pious is not only to have the right thinking about the gods, but also to be like them as far as possible. As Obbink puts it, 'piety is held to have a moral as well as a theological content, much along the lines of ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ δυνατόν "emulation of God's nature."'[285] This revision of the traditional definition of piety, which is already anticipated in Plato's *Euthyphro* and echoed, for example, in Stoicism (see 4.2.1.3)*,* is particularly well illustrated in Lucretius 5.1198-1203:[286]

> It is not piety (*pietas*) to be often seen with covered head, to be turned towards a stone and approaching every altar, nor to fall prostrate to the ground, and to stretch out hands before shrines of the gods, nor to sprinkle altars with much animal blood, nor to tie vows to vows, but rather to be able to uphold all things with a tranquil mind (*sed mage placata posse omnia mente tueri*). [MC]

There is probably a pun in this redefinition of piety as *placata mente tueri omnia posse*, in that the verb *placare* is also used with the meaning of 'placating' the gods. Rather than the different cultic activities which are often performed to 'placate' the gods, then, the pious person ought to be able to uphold everything with a 'placated' mind. Piety is thus redefined as 'to be able to survey all things with a tranquil mind,' which is an imitation of the gods, since the gods are in a state of perfect ἀταραξία. As showed later in Lucretius (6.73-78), this state of tranquility is itself produced by true worship, during which the worshipper's mind receives the *simulacra* of the gods.[287]

Piety, according to Epicurean philosophy, has thus not only a cultic aspect (participating in the civic cult) and a theological content (holding the right beliefs about god's nature) but also an ethical content, namely to emulate the gods as much as possible (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ δυνατόν).[288] It is for this reason that the suppression of *deisidaimonia*—a fear which implies that the gods are harmful and do evil—is absolutely necessary. Indeed, only a right view of the gods as unharmful leads to proper ethical conduct and proper piety. For the Epicureans, then, emulation of the gods means to live a life without harming anybody, for the gods do not harm (Philodemus *Piet.* col 71, 2032-260). This abstinence from harming people is synonymous with justice. In fact, the definition of the 'righteous person' (ὁ δίκαιος, col 76, 2203) in the *De pietate* parallels the definition of the 'pious person.' As

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[285]Obbink 1996:486.

[286]On the ideal of godlikeness or *homoiōsis theōi kata to dunaton* in Plato and his successors, see Sedley 1999.

[287]Cf. Bailey 1947:3.1516. On the Epicurean redefinition of piety along ethical lines, see also Epicurus, *Ep. Men*. 123; Cicero, *ND* 1.116.

[288]On *homoiosis theōi in* Epicureanism, cf. Erler 2002; Warren 2011.

Philodemus points out, justice and piety are—for the Epicureans—virtually the same thing: σχεδὸν ταὺτ[ὸ φαίν]εται τὸ ὅσιο[ν καὶ δί]και[ον) (col. 78, 2263-5).

The pious person is thus the person who strives to emulate the gods as much as possible. Importantly, this godlikeness (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ)—i.e. the perfect happiness enjoyed by undisturbed gods called ἀταραξία—is also the human *telos*. It is also a state in which mortal human beings can enjoy a form of divine state—immortality—even though it is experienced in this life.[289] For this reason, the Epicureans sometimes called themselves godlike (cf. Plutarch *Suav. Viv.* 1091BC; Lucretius 5.8).

4.1.2. Epicurean theology in debate: the 'harms' of gods who are not wrathful nor favourable

It is in philosophical circles that Epicurean theology and more specifically their doctrine against *deisidaimonia* came under fire. The treatise *De pietate,* written in the first century BCE and usually attributed to Philodemus, represents a defence of Epicurean piety against several of those accusations.[290] Using the *De pietate,* as well as Cicero's *philosophica* and Plutarch's polemical works, this section begins by discussing the criticisms which philosophical opponents levelled against the Epicurean treatment of the fear of the gods (*deisidaimonia*), namely their claim that the gods are influenced neither by *gratia* nor *ira*, and do not interfere in the world. It then examines how the Epicureans responded to this criticism.

4.1.2.1. The accusations of philosophical opponents

The accusations of philosophical rivals against the Epicureans doctrine of 'unwrathful' and 'unfavorable' gods proceeded along four lines.

Perhaps the most common accusation levelled against the Epicurean 'non-interventionist gods' was that it destroyed the very foundation of piety. By denying divine involvement with human affairs, the Epicureans eliminated the very basis for cultic practices such as sacrifices and prayers. In other words, because of this view, 'mysteries and festivals are regarded as foolishness, since those for whose sake they take place pay no attention to them' (Phil. *Piet.* col. 49, 1395-1402).[291] The Epicureans were thus accused of 'doing away with the whole notion of holiness (ὁσιότητα) together with the preservation of common traditions,' and of hurling people 'into insurpassable impiety' (Phil. *Piet.* col. 39-40, 1127-46). Cotta also expresses this criticism eloquently by appealing to the common accepted definition of piety as 'justice towards the gods': [292]

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[289] On this see Warren 2011.

[290] The authorship of the treatise is not totally certain. Obbink 1996:88-99.

[291] Quotations from *Piet.* are from Obbink's translation (1996).

[292] For this definition of piety, see for example: Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Phys.* 1.124: ἡ ὁσιότης, δικαιοσύνη τις οὖσα πρὸς θεούς.

Furthermore, what piety do you owe to one from whom you have received nothing? Or how can you owe anything at all to one who has done you no service? For piety is justice towards the gods; but what claim of justice is there between us and them, if god and man have no fellowship? Holiness is the science of worshipping the gods; but I do not understand on what account the gods should be worshipped if no good is received or hoped for from them. (Cicero, *ND* 1.116–117 [MC])

There is no basis for worshipping the gods if they are not responsible for our good, and if there is no hope to receive anything from them. At this point, Cotta criticizes the Epicurean solution to *superstitio*, denouncing it as destructive not only of *superstitio*, but of all *religio*.

As for the freedom from 'superstition' (*superstitione*), which is the usual boast of your school, that is easy to attain when you have taken away all the power of the gods; unless perhaps you think that Diagoras or Theodorus, who denied that there are any gods altogether, could be afraid of the gods (*superstitiosos esse*). As for me, I don't think it was possible even for Protagoras, for whom it was not clear whether the gods exist or whether they do not. For the doctrines (*sententiae*) of all those men suppress not only 'superstition' (*superstitionem*), in which there is a vain fear of the gods (*in qua inest timor inanis deorum*), but also religion (*religionem*), which is preserved by the pious cult of the gods (*quae deorum cultu pio continetur*). (Cicero, *ND* 1.117 [MC])

Here and in the following lines, Cotta dangerously compares the Epicureans with the famous atheists of antiquity, pointing out that they also suppress *superstitio*, but at the same time destroy all religion.[293] Thus, Epicurean theology seemed to eliminate not only the necessity of piety but also the possibility of any kind of relationship with the gods. Because of this, the Epicureans were accused of engaging in religious practices hypocritically, and partly for this reason, some philosophers suggested that Epicurus was really a closet atheist, engaging in popular practices only out of fear of encountering the displeasure of the common people (Plut. *Suav. viv*. 1102BC).

A second accusation was that the Epicureans had also eliminated the greatest characteristic of divine excellence: goodness and benevolence. This criticism, closely associated with the accusation of

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[293]The ancient understanding of 'atheism' was broader than the outright 'denial of the existence of the gods.' Ancient discussions of 'atheists' tend to include agnostics (e.g., Protagoras), and those whose views were taken to imply that there are no gods (e.g. Epicurus). Cf. *P.Herc*. 1428 col.14.32-15.8. On this subject, cf. Obbink 1996:1-2.

abolishing all religion, was voiced frequently by both Academic and Stoic philosophers.[294] For example, at the end of book 1 of the *De natura deorum,* Cotta says:

> Epicurus, however, when he took away from the immortal gods both their power to bring aid (*opem*) and their kindness (*gratiam*), uprooted completely religion from the heart of men. For although he affirms that the nature of god is the noblest and the most excellent (*optimam et praestantissimam*), yet he also denies that there is kindness (*gratiam*) in god, [that is to say] he takes away what is most characteristic (*maxime proprium*) of the noblest and most excellent (*optimae praestantissimaeque*) nature. For what is better or more excellent than kindness and beneficence (*bonitate et beneficentia*)? (*ND* 1.121 [MC])

There is a clear allusion here to the Epicurean definition of the gods as neither moved by *ira* nor by *gratia*. For both the Academics and the Stoics, however, suppressing the attribute of goodness from the gods was tantamount to denying their excellence, and thus there very existence as gods, since the gods are, by definintion, the most excellent beings which exist. For Cotta, divine excellence must be manifested in *gratia*. Continuing his refutation of the Epicurean understanding of the gods and in particular their claim that *gratia* and *ira* are signs of weaknesses, Cotta points to the Stoics, who used the paradigm of friendship to explain how 'benefits' can be exchanged with the gods, even though they do not need anything (*ND* 1.122 [MC]). Indeed, even though the gods are indeed in need of nothing which human beings can give them, this need not imply their lack of care for human beings and the impossibility of a relationship between men and gods. The relationship between true friends is not based on a utilitarian, mercenary basis—i.e. the *do ut des* principle—but on disinterested love and common love for the good. Likewise, the gods care for human beings because of their own excellence, which is most supremely expressed in their goodness and beneficence, and because 'there is natural affection between the good.' In Cotta's (and the Stoics') view, not only are the gods friends with each other, but it is possible for human beings to be friend with the gods. This friendship is based on common affection for the good and for virtue, and it is the virtuous man (i.e. the wise) who is the friend of the gods.

The third criticism against the Epicurean suppression of divine providence was that it is potentially damaging to mankind and the state, because it threatens the moral fabric of society. Philodemus hints at this type of charge in his treatise (*Piet*. col. 46-47, 1306-1344). Indeed, to deny that the gods punish the wicked and reward the good threatens to eliminate what preserves social cohesion, reducing human society to a society of beasts. Plutarch raises this issue in his treatise against Colotes, one of Epicurus' disciples.

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[294]According to Plutarch, the Stoics frequently attacked Epicurean theology based on the notion that the gods are 'beneficent and humane' (εὐεργετικοὺς καὶ φιλανθρώπους) (Plutarch, *Stoic. rep*. 1051DE; cf. 1052B).

Then when will our life be that of a beast, savage and unsociable? When the laws are taken away, but the arguments of those who urge to pleasure remain, when the providence of the gods is not believed in, and when people hold as wise those who spit on the good, if no pleasure attends it, and who mock and scoff at words such as these:

'An eye there is of Justice, that sees all,' and 'For God standing near, looks from nigh at hand,' and: 'God, even as the old account relates, holding the beginning, middle and end of the universe, accomplishes his purposes rightly, walking according to his nature; Justice follows him, punishing those who fall short of divine law.'[295] (*Adv. Col.* 1124E–1125A [MC])[296]

There is no sign that Epicurus or the Epicureans were ever troubled politically for advancing views threatening mankind or society, as Philodemus emphasizes in his defence. Philodemus does, however, devote a significant part of his treatise on piety to this issue of harms and benefits from the gods and to defending the view that Epicurean theology is no socially harmful and preserves justice better than the poets and the views of philosophical opponents (see below). Obviously, among philosophical rivals, the 'unharmful' gods of the Epicureans were denounced as harmful to human society, religion, and mankind in general.

In the same vein, a last criticism deserves mention. By denying divine providence the Epicureans were also accused of depriving the pious of their good hopes to be the beneficiaries of divine salvation, reward and vindication. This is an important point in Plutarch's *Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum*, a treatise where the Platonist endeavours to demonstrate that Epicurus' philosophy—far from enabling people from attaining the Epicurean ethical goal of pleasure—actually makes a pleasant life impossible. Indeed, Plutarch points out that while the Epicureans might be able to suppress in some measure the fear of the gods (*deisidaimonia*), at the same time, they also suppress any hope of receiving something good from the gods (1100F). This might be the simple hope to have one's prayer heard at a festival, the hope of receiving help from the gods in a dangerous situation like a strom at sea, or the greatest hope of all, i.e. the reward of immortality for one's just and good life (1105C). At this point, Plutarch has moved to criticize more specifically the denial of an afterlife by the Epicureans. But the use of the language of reward of the just and punishment of the wicked shows its close connection with divine providence.

What then do we think about the good (τῶν ἀγαθῶν) and those who have lived holy and righteous lives (βεβιωκότων ὁσίως καὶ δικαίως), who look forward to nothing evil in that other world, but to what is most excellent and divine (τὰ κάλλιστα καὶ θειότατα)? For first, as athletes do not receive the crown while there are contesting, but when the contest is over and

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[295]Plato, *Leg.* 4.715 E-716A.

[296]On Plutarch's critique of Epicureanism, cf. Hershell 1992b.

they have obtained the victory, thus those who believe that the awards of victory (τὰ νικητήρια) of life await the good after life, are inspired wonderfully to virtue under the expectation of those hopes, which includes to see those who in their wealth and power are now committing outrages (τοὺς ὑβρίζοντας) and foolishly (ἀνοήτως) laugh at the higher powers (τῶν κρειττόνων) receiving the judgment they deserve (ἀξίαν δίκην). (*Suav. viv*. 1105C-1106A [MC])

Although Plutarch's argument is influenced by his aim of denouncing Epicurean self-contradictions, it is clear that his Platonic concerns about the goodness of god—which includes his righteous treatment of humanity—and the transcendence of death motivate his argument. Philodemus also alludes to the charge that Epicureans 'deprive good and just men of the fine expectations which they have of the gods,' in *De pietate* (col. 49-50, 1412-1425), confirming that this was a common criticism of their theology.

4.1.2.2.   The Epicurean counter-arguments

A significant part of Philodemus' *De pietate* specifically addresses the philosophical accusations connected to the Epicurean denial of providence. Of the six sections of the treatise, the third (cols. 36-59) addresses the accusation that Epicureans leave no rationale for piety and dwells at length on the Epicurean doctrine of harms and benefits from the gods. The fourth section (cols. 60-86) then discusses the origin of atheism and justice, and argues that the Epicurean doctrine, unlike the doctrines of the poets or other philosophers, does not threaten social justice, but provides a more solid basis for it. Those two counter-arguments are briefly discussed in this section.

The Epicurean doctrine of harms and benefits from the gods

Against the accusation that their theology destroyed piety altogether, the Epicureans pointed to a redefinition of the popular view that the gods transmit 'harms and benefits' to human beings.

> But I by contrast do not think that this manner on account of these things impiously does away with the whole notion of holiness together with the preservation of common traditions, and that, as those who are said to be *deisidaimones* think (ὡ[ς] δ' οἱ λεγόμεν[οι δει]σιδαίμονες), it hurls us into unsurpassable impiety. For pious is the person who preserves the immortality and consummate blessedness of God together with all the things included by us; but impious is the person who banishes either where God is concerned. And the person who sees also that the good and ill sent us by God come without any unhealthy anger or benevolence, declares that God has no need of human things . . . (Philodemus, *Piet.* col. 39-40, 1127-55 [Obbink slightly modified])

After affirming that piety is to have opinions about the gods which preserve their immortality and blessedness, Philodemus adds another detail: the pious person also rightly conceives that god provides goods and ills (τῶν ἀγαθῶν καὶ τῶν κακῶν) but without being affected by weakening anger and favour (χωρὶς ὀργῆς καὶ χάριτος ἀσθενούσης) which would suggest that they need us. Thus, while they denied that human beings can, by their cultic practices, influence the gods towards anger or favour, the Epicureans nonetheless held that the gods have beneficent and harmful influences upon human beings. This, however, the gods did without interfering in the world, by giving 'harms and benefits' to the good and to the wicked through their notions of the gods. The conceptions people have of the gods affects them, either under the form of harm or benefit. The passage of Philodemus above recalls the later part of Epicurus' *Ad Men.* 123.

> For the utterances of the multitude concerning the gods are not preconceptions, but false assumptions; hence it is that the greatest harms happen to the wicked and the greatest benefits happen to the good from the gods (ἔνθεν αἱ μέγισται βλάβαι τε τοῖς κακοῖς ἐκ θεῶν ἐπάγονται καὶ ὠφέλειαι τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς). For they always accept those who are similar to their own virtues as one's own, but consider as alien what is not of their kind (ταῖς γὰρ ἰδίαις οἰκειούμενοι διὰ παντὸς ἀρεταῖς τοὺς ὁμοίους ἀποδέχονται, πᾶν τὸ μὴ τοιοῦτον ὡς ἀλλότριον νομίζοντες). (*Ad Men.* 123 [MC])[297]

As Obbink notes, the causal role traditionally attributed to the gods in conferring harms and benefits to humanity is here redefined along the notion of ὁμοίωσις θεῷ, or divine emulation. Thus, although divine intervention in the world is ruled out by its incompatibility with the gods' own blessedness, the gods do have a real, albeit indirect, influence on human beings, inasmuch as one's own view of the gods affects one's own διάθεσις or psychosomatic constitution for better of for worse. Thus, as Obbink puts it, 'the wise, who preserves a correct conception of the gods, derive a sense of immense calm and religious awe from perceiving and imitating their nature.'[298] On the other hand, the one who has mistaken notions of the gods as being moved by anger or favour is himself affected by those false notions. At the same time, the notions people have of the gods is dependant upon their own 'moral' condition. As the last sentence from *Ad Men.* 123 quoted above shows, the wise have conceptions of the gods as virtuous because of their own virtue. Festugière paraphrases this sentence as follows: the wise 'have familiarized themselves with the true nature of the gods through their own excellence and

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[297]For a discussion of this passage: Festugière 1946:48-50, Long-Sedley 1987:2.145, Obbink 1996:459-64.

[298]Obbink 1996:9-10.

thus easily receive in their mind gods which are like themselves, rejecting all what is not such as foreign to divine nature.'[299]

This doctrine of 'harms and benefits' from the gods plays a crucial role in Epicurean theology, and the third part of Philodemus's treatise is entirely devoted to it. It provides not only a rationale for engaging in the cult, but an incentive for it. Indeed, when one engages in cultic practices with the correct notion of the gods, one strengthens those correct notions in oneself, and thus gains a greater peace of mind. For example, the wise form their correct notions of the divine especially during festivals (*Piet.* col. 25, 765-73). Cultic practices thus had to be performed with a right view of the gods—and above all—without opinions about the gods which would create disturbance (cf. *Piet.* 873-898).

When the wise engages in rituals with a correct view of the gods then, reaching a perfect state of ἀταραξία, he becomes like god in so far as it is possible for mortal nature. This explains why Epicureans did not just 'tolerate' participation in traditional religious practices, but actively encouraged it as something beneficial. Participation in the cult strengthened one's view of the gods, thus enabling one to be benefited by them by becoming like them. On the other hand, evil men are harmed by their own defective conceptions of the gods, suffering from the fears of post mortem-punishment (*Piet.* 2233-41; cf. Lucretius *NR* 6.68-78). [300]

There is thus a sense in which the Epicureans spoke of the gods as the 'cause' or 'source' of retribution and salvation for humanity (αἰτία νεμέσεως καὶ σωτηρία ἀνθρώποις in *Piet.* 1044-9). Recasting the traditional beliefs that the gods harm and benefit humanity along psychological lines thus also enabled the Epicureans to show that their doctrine fitted common conceptions of the gods, after those had been purified.[301]

The gods of the poets and other philosophers as harmful for justice

As mentioned above, the philosophical opponents of the Epicureans criticized their theology for being harmful, or at least not beneficial, to mankind. They denounced their view of the gods as uninvolved in human affairs as a potential threat to social justice.

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[299]Festugière 1946:85.

[300]Obbink 1996:395: 'The choice between types of gods, and hence of harm or benefit, is to some extent beyond an individual's control: it is determined by the kind of person one is: since we have affinity for our own virtues, we all individually of necessity choose gods like ourselves (Epic. *Ad Menoec.* 124). But obviously Epicurus thinks that it is possible through reasoning to sort out our ideas about divinity, conceptually improve if not exchange one's gods, and so maximize benefits.'

[301]Obbink 1996:10-11.

Against this accusation, Philodemus argued that the Epicurean doctrine of harms and benefits from the gods provides a much stronger religious basis for social justice than the accounts of the poets or the doctrines of their philosophical rivals. This argument takes up a very large part in the latter part of his treatise on piety, which is very much preoccupied with the question of justice and theodicy.

He thus begins by demonstrating that, according to the Epicurean view, a divine justice is constantly at work in that the unjust and wicked suffer punishment in the form of mental anguish because they believe in gods like themselves – i.e. who will hurt them in this life and in the next (col. 76-77). On the other hand, the righteous who do not harm anybody are benefited by their views of unharmful gods in that they derive an incredible peace and sense of security. There is thus a very direct incentive to being righteous, since it is beneficial. As Philodemus emphasizes, for the Epicureans, then, piety and justice are virtually the same thing (*Piet.* col. 78, 2263-5).

The view of the gods propagated by the poets and other philosophers, however, not only does not ensure social justice and piety, but actually encourages injustice and impiety. Unlike what is commonly affirmed, Philodemus contends that it is not useful to encourage belief in the myths to preserve social justice. The claim that the gods punish the wicked – made both by the poets and other philosophers – is hardly a deterrent of wickedness and injustice in society, for it is obvious that the gods do not enact such a retribution on the wicked, at least not in the crass sense advocated by the myths (col. 80, 2313-20). In the latter part of his treatise, Philodemus discusses in detail the poets and the different philosophical schools, underscoring their failure to provide a deterrent for injustice. His exposition climaxes with the Stoics, whose view he denounces as not only failing to promote justice, but actually *encouraging* injustice. Indeed, if people who blaspheme the traditional gods are not punished by those gods for their wickedness, nobody will ever refrain from injustice out of fear of gods who are as insensible as the Stoics' aethers and breezes (*P Herc*. 1428 cols. 13-15).[302] Philodemus concludes his argument against the Stoics by returning their accusation against them, reproaching them for 'turning human life into that of beasts.'

4.2.   The Stoics on *deisidaimonia*, the gods, and piety

4.2.1.   *Deisidaimonia* and piety in Stoic philosophy
4.2.1.1.   *The Stoic criticism of* deisidaimonia

The criticism of the fear of the gods or *deisidaimonia* did not have for the Stoics the central role it had in Epicurean philosophy. Epictetus, for example, does not use the terminology of δεισιδαιμονία at all,

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[302]Obbink 1996:496, cf. Henrichs 1974a:25.

and does not discuss the fear of the gods in the sources which have come down to us.[303] The Stoics did, however, denounce it, and we know of two treatises entirely devoted to that subject. According to Athenaeus (*Deipn.* 8), Antipater of Tarsus (died c. 130 BCE) wrote a Περὶ Δεισιδαιμονίας which has not come down to us. The second treatise is Seneca's *De superstitione,* of which some fragments were incorporated in Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*. Because the fragments do not mention the word *superstitio* and are extracted out of their original context, this section relies primarily on the criticism found in Seneca's other writings and in the mouth of Balbus in Cicero's *ND*.

Turning first to Cicero's *ND*, as discussed earlier, in the first book *superstitio* refers to what Epicureanism strives above all to eliminate, namely the fear of the gods. Later, Cotta identifies *superstitio* as containing a 'vain or groundless fear of the gods' (*timor inanis deorum*) and distinguishes it from *religio* which 'consists in the pious worship of the gods' (*deorum cultu pio continetur*) (1.117).[304] A similar distinction between *superstitio* and *religio* is expressed by the Stoic spokesman Balbus in the second book.

> For not only the philosophers but also our ancestors have distinguished *superstitio* from religion. For those who were praying and sacrificing during entire days so that their children might outlive (*superstites essent*) them, were called 'superstitious' (*superstitiosi sunt appellati*), and the word later acquired a wider application. On the other hand, those who reconsider carefully and so to speak reread all what concerns the cult of the gods, those indeed were called 'religious' (*religiosi*) from *religere* (to reread), like elegant from *eligere* (to select), 'diligent' from *diligere* (to value), 'intelligent' from *intellegere* (to understand); for in all these words there is the same strength as picking out (*legendi*) that there is in 'religious.' Thus 'superstitious' (*superstitioso*) and 'religious' (*religioso*) came to be terms of censure (*vitii*) and approval (*laudis*) respectively. (*ND* 2.71-72 [MC])

Although several scholars concur that *superstitio* most likely does come from *superstes* or *superstites*, the validity of Cicero's etymological explanation of *superstitio* has often been rejected.[305] Indeed, it is not clear how people praying all day that their children might outlive them would lead to them being called pejoratively '*superstitiosi*.' After all, the desire that one's children outlive oneself is a very

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[303]A TLG search retrieves four occurences of δεισιδαιμονία attributed to Chrysippus, each time identifying it as a kind of fear among other vices.

[304]Cotta: […] *non modo superstitionem tollunt in qua inest timor inanis deorum, sed etiam religionem quae deorum cultu pio continetur*.

[305]Otto (1909:550) rejects it as *kindisch*; Beveniste 1969, who discusses many theories about the origin of *superstitio*, does not discuss Cicero's explanation. Other ancient authors have provided other etymological explanations of *superstitio*, but they cannot be discussed here.

legitimate and common desire in antiquity. Thus, Janssen suggested that this practice was criticized because it showed an excessive interest for personal concerns, at the detriment of the concern of public affairs, which is what true religion was supposed to concern itself for.[306] This explanation, however, does not fit with the way *superstitio* is understood or criticized elsewhere in the *ND*: nowhere is *superstitio* criticized because it is obsessed with personal piety. Rather, as this chapter has begun to argue, in *ND superstitio* refers to a groundless fear of the gods.

Despite the reluctance of scholars to accept his explanation, this meaning does, in fact, make good sense of Cicero's etymological argument. Indeed, the text does not suggest that people were called '*superstitiosi*' because they desired that their children outlive them. As Janssen has amply demonstrated in his study, that children outlive their parents—at least once they had survived the first few precarious years of their young life—was not only every parent's desire, but the normal *ordo naturae*.[307] In this context, it was certainly not a bad or impious desire to wish that one's children live longer than oneself. Rather, what led to those parents being called '*superstitiosi*' is that they were 'praying and sacrificing entire days' to ensure that *what is normal* would happen, a persistence which shows that they were overly scared that the gods would allow or perhaps even cause the children to die prematurely.[308] The attitude of the *superstitiosi* thus betrays an inordinate fear of the gods, and possibly a serious lack of belief in their goodness. It is this abnormal fear which led people to call them *superstitiosi*, namely 'the survivors.'[309]

Balbus uses *superstitio* two other times, both in the context of the false beliefs and crazy errors which have been generated by the myths.

> Do you see therefore how from a true and useful natural philosophy the account has evolved into imaginary and counterfeit gods? This has generated false beliefs, unruly errors and *superstitiones* hardly above old wives' tales [*falsas opiniones erroresque turbulentos et superstitiones paene aniles*]. And indeed, we know the forms of the gods, their age, dress and equipment, and also their ancestry, marriages and relationships, and all is converted into the likeness of human frailty [*omniaque traducta ad similitudinem inbecillitatis humanae*]. For they are given to perturbed feelings: indeed, we learn of their being in love, afflicted, angry; and as the myths tell us, they even engage in wars and battles, and not only when the gods support

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[306]Janssen 1975:173; 1979:142.

[307]Janssen 1975:161-163.

[308]On the 'superstitious' persons' belief that the gods might avenge themselves against them by killing their children, cf. Plutarch, *Superst.* 170A.

[309]I am not hereby endorsing the validity of Cicero's explanation of the origin of *superstitio*, but only explaining the logic of the origin he suggests. To my knowledge, the explanation I am advancing here has never been proposed in scholarship.

different sides when two armies are opposed to each other, as in Homer, but they even fought wars of their own as with the Titans and the Giants. Such things are rapported and believed most foolishly and are full of nonsense and the greatest depravity. But though despising and repudiating these myths, we shall nevertheless be able to understand the divine permeating nature and several elements, Ceres permeating earth, Neptune the sea, and others, who and of what they are like; and it is our duty to revere and worship these gods under the names which tradition has bestowed upon them. (Cicero, *ND* 2.70–71 [MC])

The Stoics did not generally reject the myths but insisted on the necessity to interpret them allegorically within the framework of Stoic philosophy.[310] This is what is alluded to in the last sentence. What the passage criticizes is a literal interpretation of the myths whereby the gods are anthropomorphized and are attributed 'perturbed feelings' and depraved actions like men. The context thus suggests that *superstitiones* (i.e. vain fears of the gods—or perhaps religious scruples, or practices or beliefs inspired by them) are generated when the gods are believed to have feelings such as love, affliction and anger, and to engage in battles and depraved actions. The second passage confirms this reading.

> Another account also, even scientific, has been the source of a great multitide of deities, who dressed up in human form (*specie humana*) have supplied the poets with legends, while filling up the life of men with every kind of *superstitio* (*superstitione omni*). And this topic treated by Zeno was later explained more fully by Cleanthes and Chrysippus. For while the ancient belief had spread through Greece that, Caelus (i.e. Uranus) having been mutilated by his son Saturne, Saturn himself had bound Caelus, a scientific account not unreasonable (*non inelegans*) is contained in those impious tales (*impias fabulas*). […] But Jupiter himself—that is the helping father, whom with a change of inflexion we call Jove from juvare 'to help', is called by the poets 'father of gods and men,' and by our ancestors 'the best and greatest', and indeed 'best,' that is 'most beneficent,' comes before 'the greatest' because to benefit to all (*prodesse omnibus*) is greater and certainly more beloved than to have great wealth […] (Cicero, *ND* 2. 63–64 [MC])

Again, it is the depiction of the gods as immoral beings in the myths which is criticized, and which earlier Stoics (Zeno, Cleanthes and Chrysippus) corrected by providing allegorical interpretation. In both passages then, Balbus points out that tales depicting the gods as immoral and evil—and thus

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[310]See, however, Seneca's critic of allegorical interpretation of mythical gods at the beginning of his *De beneficiis* (Sen. *Ben*. 1.3.2-4.6). On Seneca and Cornutus' attitude towards poetry and the allegorical interpretation of myth, cf. Setaioli 2004:341-367.

potentially hostile and harmful—has given rise to *superstitiones* (i.e. vain fears of the gods or possibly, by metonymy again, apotropaic practices). This, however, is mistaken since, as Balbus emphasizes, 'Jupiter'—as indicated by the etymology of his name—is the 'helping' father. Indeed, the greatest being is a *beneficent* being. Here lies the heart of the Stoic criticism of *superstitio*: the gods are beneficent and good and do not harm. *Superstitio* then is the fear produced by the belief that the gods are evil and harm.

The same idea is found in Seneca's treatment of the topic. The word *superstitio* occurs nine times in his extent works, many times in contexts which we have already encountered elsewhere.[311] Thus in *Thyestes* 678, Seneca speaks of the *superstitio inferum*, i.e. the fear (of the gods) associated with the underworld. Again in the context of the fear of death, Seneca writes that Nature enjoins men to leave the world as they came into it, namely 'without desires, fears, *superstitio* (*sine superstitione*), treachery and other curses' (*Ep.* 22.15). He also links *superstitio* with the fear generated by eclipses which make 'cities cry out and each person make a din in accordance with inane *superstitio*' (*Nat.* 7.1.2.78). Finally, as several authors did in the case of the Jews, he also mentions abstinence from animal food in certain foreign cults as a proof of *superstitio* (*Ep.* 121.4.2).

One of the most useful passages to understand Seneca's treatment of *superstitio* is *Ep.* 123:

> Poverty is an evil to nobody unless he rebels against it. Death is not an evil: you ask how so? Death alone is the equal right of mankind. *Superstitio* is a crazy error; it fears those whom it ought to love; it dishonors those whom it worships. For what difference is there between you denying the gods or you defaming them?' (*Superstitio error insanus est: amandos timet, quos colit violat. Quid enim interest utrum deos neges an infames?*) (Seneca, *Ep.* 123.16 [MC])

Superstitio is the error whereby one fears the gods rather than loving them. This is not only foolish, for the gods are good and not to be feared; but it is also impious, for it implies that the gods are evil or wrathful.[312] For Seneca, this is not different from denying their existence. As the wider context shows, the passage aims to correct understandings about evil along Stoic lines, redefining poverty and death as indifferents rather than evils. The criticism of *superstitio* is thus also to be understood as a correction of the mistaken notion that the gods are evil or harmful. Seneca's argument here is similar to Plutarch's criticism in *De superstitione,* where he explains that *deisidaimonia* is 'an assumption productive of fear which utterly humbles and crushes a man, for he thinks that there are gods, but that they are the cause of pain and injury' (Plut. *Superst.* 165B [LCL]). Plutarch likewise denounces *deisidaimonia* as impiety because it assumes that the gods are evil and cruel (*Superst.* 169F-170A).

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[311]The search was run with PHI and does not include the fragments of the treatise on the subject.

[312]Cf. Setaioli 2007:353, 349. Seneca also highlights the difference between religion and *superstitio* along those lines in *Clem.* 2.5.1.

It is probably a similar argument which runs in the background of Seneca's criticism of *superstitio* in his lost work *De superstitione*.[313] Several of those fragments are regularly used as evidence of the philosopher's criticism of traditional religion or cultic statues, not least in discussions of Acts 17. But the absence of the context of those excerpts integrated in Augustine's polemic makes their meaning in Seneca's original argument very difficult to assertain. Augustine himself begins by claiming that Seneca was more unambiguous about his criticism of civic religion than Varro (*Civ.* 10.1),[314] but he also points out that Seneca continued to follow traditional religion and enjoined others to do so albeit out of obedience to the laws and traditions, rather than because they are welcomed by the gods (*Civ.* 10.6-7).[315] This suggests that his treatise was probably not a wholesale rejection of cultic images and all religious traditions. In light of the preceding discussion of the criticism of '*superstitio*' in Seneca and other authors, it is noteworthy that several of those fragments reflect a concern about practices and divine representations which imply or suggest that the gods are terrifying, harmful, wrathful or immoral. For example, in his discussion of statues, Seneca writes:

> They consecrate the sacred, immortal, indestructible deities in materials totally tawdry and lifeless. They clothe them in the appearances of men and beasts and fishes; some indeed depict them as both male and female entwined in divergent bodies. They call them deities, but if they came alive and suddenly confronted them, they would be regarded as monstrosities. (*Superst. ap.* Aug. *Civ.* 10.2 [Walsh])

Seneca denounces not just the materiality and anthropomorphism of statues, but specifically their terrifying aspects and the fact that these are called deities. In another fragment, he criticizes those who mutilate and hurt themselves as an offering to the gods or to avert their wrath, denouncing those practices as even worse than what is inflicted by tyrants.

> One man […] slices off his genitals, and another slashes his arms. Since these are the means by which they deserve to have the gods look kindly on them, for what behaviour do they fear their

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[313]Those fragments are mainly contained in Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, book X. Walsh 2014 is followed for the English and Latin text here.

[314]'[…] For in the book which he composed against superstitions, he condemned the civic theology of the city at much greater length and with much greater emphasis than Varro had censuered that of the theatre and of myth.' (*Civ.* 10.1 [Walsh]).

[315]'What he says is: "The wise man will preserve all these rites on the ground that they are prescribed by laws rather than welcomed by the gods." […] "As for all that undistinguished horde of gods garnered over many years by lenthy superstition (*superstitio*), we will worship them," he says, "but we shall keep in mind that their worship is related more to custom than to actuality." ' (*Civ.*6 [Walsh]).

wrath? If this is the kind of worship the gods seek, they should not be worshipped by any kind whatsoever. (*Civ.*10.3 [Walsh])

He also denounces services to the gods, and in particular those which imply their immorality, such as women on the Capitol claiming to wait for their lover Jupiter, and mocks the poet describing a jealous Juno.

> Then a little later he remarks: 'Yet though these men offer pointless service to god, that service is neither squalid nor obscene. Some women sit on the Capitol believing that Jupiter is their lover. They are undeterred even when Juno eyes them very angrily, if you care to believe the poets.' (Augustine, C*iv*. 10.5 [Walsh])

Again, the interpretation of those fragments is ultimately uncertain. But they would be consistent with Seneca's criticism of *superstitio* as the fear of wrathful or harmful gods which need to be placated.[316]

Like Balbus, then, Seneca associates *superstitio* with the fear generated by the belief in harmful gods, a belief which is nourished by literal interpretation of the poets, anthropomorphic or terrifying divine representations, and natural phenomena interpreted as signals of divine displeasure (e.g. eclipses). It is also associated with the fear of death and afterlife punishment, and gives rise to deviant religious practices—such as absention from certain foods, self-harm or trying to please the gods through all kinds of services. What is perhaps distinctive in Balbus and Seneca's criticism of *superstitio* is that it is regularly associated with an *anthropomorphic* representation of the gods both in myths and statues, and thus the association of passions, wicknesses and needs to the gods. The phenomenon of *superstitio,* however, is the same as what was denounced in the writings of the Epicureans, and like them, the Stoics believed it to be a perversion of piety, and something to be eliminated. Their solution, however, differed from the Epicurean one because they rejected their understanding of the nature of the gods.

4.2.1.2.   *The nature of the gods: provident benefactors of the human race*
Like the Epicureans, the Stoics saw *deisidaimonia* as rooted in ignorance about the nature of the gods, and its solution in knowledge of their true nature. Unlike the Epicureans, however, the Stoics stressed

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[316]Attridge (1978:68) argues that the heart of Seneca's criticism of *superstitio* is 'the emotional condition which is fostered by the religious practices which he castigates.' He points out that this emotionalism was 'incompatible with the Stoic ideal of the sage who has freed himself from passion.' Attridge is certainly right that Seneca denounces *superstitio* as *furor,* madness; but the heart of his criticism is that *superstitio* displays a misapprehension of the true nature of the gods as good and beneficent towards mankind. The next section confirms this reading.

that progress away from *deisidaimonia* necessitated the realization that god *is beneficent and cares for humanity*. This is emphasized by Seneca:

> Although one hears what limit (or what manner: *quem modum*) he must keep in sacrifices, and how far he sould recoil from troublesome *superstitionibus* (*quam procul resilire a molestis superstitionibus*), he will never make sufficient progress, unless he conceives a right idea of god, regarding him as possessing all things (*omnia habentem*), allotting all things (*omnia tribuentem*), and bestowing them freely (*beneficum gratis*). And what reason have the gods for doing deeds of kindness (*Quae causa est dis bene faciendi*)? It is their nature. One errs if he thinks that they are unwilling to harm; they cannot. They cannot receive nor are able to inflict injury; for doing harm and to suffer harm are connected. This greatest and most beautiful nature of all has not even made threatening those whom it has removed from danger. (*Ep.* 95.49 [MC])

In this context, *superstitionibus* most probably refers to practices meant to avert the wrath of the gods. Progress against *superstitio* necessitates the right idea of god as 'possessing all things, alloting all things, and bestowing them freely,' namely in understanding that god is good and what he does is good. The Stoics argued that god's providential and beneficent nature is part of the human preconceptions about god.[317] As mentioned earlier, it is precisely for denying this divine excellence manifested in goodness and providence that the Stoics criticized the Epicurean solution to *deisidaimonia*.[318]

To strengthen and defend their belief in a provident and beneficent god, the Stoics used cosmological and teleological arguments emphasizing the good design of the cosmos—its beauty and purposefulness, and especially the propitiousness of the world for *human* life, the beneficiary of divine goodness by excellence (see esp. Cic. *ND* 2).[319] Crucially, however, and this distinguished them from the Platonists, the Stoics saw god as immanent and identical with Nature. God, also called the *Logos* (rationality) or Nature, permeates the whole world and ensures its rationality and orderliness. Therefore, they also identified god with fate and providence. Importantly for the problem of *deisidaimonia*, this immanence of the divine ensures that the world is the best as it can possibly be. God as fate determines everything and his providence ensures the goodness of the cosmos. Providence does not only secure that 'the world as a whole is a beautiful and well-organized' animal (Cicero, *ND*

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[317]Chrysippus *ap*. Plut. *Stoic. rep.* 1051E. On Stoic theology, see Mansfeld 1999; Algra 2003.

[318]Plut. *Stoic. Rep.* 1051DE.

[319]'Many further illustrations could be given of this wise and careful providence of nature, to illustrate the lavishness and splendour of the gifts bestowed by the gods on men.' (*ND* 2.140 [LCL])

II 58, and 71-153), but it also 'extends to the position of man: the world is said to be there for the sake of gods and men (Cicero *ND* II 154-167).'[320]

If the Stoic god is good and beneficent, it needs to be stressed that the Stoics identified the good as virtue or perfect rationality. Above all then, god's beneficence and providence towards men is expressed in that he has given them the greatest gift of all—reason (*ND* 2.147). Thanks to this rationality, this *logos* within themselves, human beings are able to 'tune' themselves with the *logos* which permeates the cosmos and thus 'live according to nature,' which is the Stoic *telos*. This life according to nature is equivalent to the virtuous life, and enables humanity to become like god himself, fully rational, virtuous and good. Virtue then, according to the Stoic, is the only good, and vice the only evil. The rest—including health, wealth and even life itself—is redefined as indifferent because it is not 'up to us' (Sen. *Ben.* 1.6.2; Epict. *Ench.* 31.2). God is good, not only because he has created a good world—orderly and tailored for humanity—but because he has given humanity the greatest gift of all, rationality, which is what he needs to withstand everything which happens in life.[321] There is thus no need to fear 'this god who possesses all things, allots all things, and gives them freely.'

4.2.1.3. *The Stoics on traditional religion and true piety*

The evidence is limited, and some Stoics were probably more critical of tradition than others, but the sources suggest that the Stoics generally engaged in traditional cultic practices, including the worship of the statues of the gods in temples.[322] For example, Balbus and Epictetus enjoin people to worship the gods according to tradition.

> It is our duty to revere and worship these gods [Ceres, Neptune and others—MvH] under the names which custom has bestowed upon them. (Balbus in Cicero, *ND* 2.71)

> It is always appropriate to make libations, and sacrifices, and to give of the firstfruits after the manner of our fathers, and to do all this with purity, and not in slovenly or careless fashion, nor, in a niggardly way, nor yet beyond our means. (Epictetus, *Ench.* 31.5)

Balbus mentions divination and omen as evidence both for the existence of the gods and for their care for mankind, even if, like medical diagnostics, they can be misinterpreted (Cic. *ND* 2.12, 163).

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[320]Algra 2003:170.

[321]On this topic, cf. Algra 2007b:40-41.

[322]On the attitude of the Stoics to traditional religion, see Babut 1974 (he identifies a continual tension between criticism and conservatism), Pià 2011, Algra 2003:168-170, 2007a, 2009, Attridge 1978:66-69. For Seneca's attitude, see also André 1983, Manning 1996, Setaioli 2007, Merckel 2012.

Epictetus assumes the appropriateness of traditional cultic practices in his work, such as the interpretation of omen (*Diss.* 3.1.37; frag. 32), making sacrifices or the Mysteries of Eleusis (*Diss.* 3.21.12–16), and lists reverence to god as part of the duties of mankind (*Diss.* 3.2.4; 3.7.26).[323] Seneca is often singled out as more critical than other Stoics towards traditional religion.[324] But as we have seen above, despite his criticism, he enjoined to follow traditions even if it is more out of custom that because it represents worship pleasing to the gods. Certainly, this is hardly a happy endorsement, but it suggests that Seneca did not find following such traditions incompatible with his philosophical commitments.[325]

Because they believed in a god which permeates everything, the Stoics could revere a plural manifestation of the divinity 'under the names which tradition has bestowed upon them' (Cicero, *ND* 2.70-71). At the same time, they insisted on the necessity to interpret the myths allegorically and firmly rejected their literal interpretation. Their acceptance of tradition was thus qualified. But because they believed that human beings have preconceptions of the gods, the Stoics also argued that old beliefs or traditions contain elements of truth.[326] They were thus able to assign a positive role to the myths and traditions if they were interpreted philosophically and provide a philosophical basis for their 'qualified' integration into the 'religion' of the philosopher. The Stoics' attitude towards the tradition is thus better described by words such as reinterpretation, adaptation, or 'appropriation,' rather than total rejection or acceptance.[327]

As for the veneration of statues, the fragments from Seneca's treatise against *superstitio* certainly denounces lifeless and horrible divine representations (Cf. *Superst. ap.* Aug. *Civ.* 10.2 quoted in 4.2.1.1), as well as the services to the statues which are interpreted as service to the gods.

> One servant informs Jupiter of the names of his worshippers, another announces the hours: one is his bather, another his anointer […] There are women who are hairdressers for Juna and Minerva: while standing far away from the temple as well as from the image they move the

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[323]On Epictetus and Stoic theology, cf. Algra 2007b:32–55; Long 2002:156.

[324]For Seneca as more critical, or at least more elaborate and explicit in his criticism towards popular religion (e.g. Attridge 1978:67; Manning 1996; Algra 2009:240).

[325]Modern scholars usually find him inconsistent (Attridge 1978:69; Algra 2009:240-41).

[326]Cf. Algra 2009: 228-232; Algra 2003:169. He concludes (169-70): 'It would be wrong to view these varying Stoic conceptions of god as the result of incoherent and unconnected concessions to the tradition. In fact, the Stoics took great pains to account for the juxtaposition of what we might call pantheistic and polytheistic elements in their theology, by 'appropriating' and reinterpreting some aspects of traditional polytheism, while clearly rejecting others.'

[327]Algra (2009:234) notes that 'appropriation' (συνοικειοῦν) is the term used by Philodemus to describe Chrysippus' practice (cf. Philodemus, *Piet.* P. Herc. 1428, col. 4.16-26), and Cicero uses *accommodare* in the same connection (*ND* 1.41).

fingers as if they were dressing the hair, there are others who hold a mirror. (*Superst. ap* Aug. *Civ. Dei* 6.10)

But it is hard to know if the philosopher was totally opposed to any representation of the gods in statues or any such ritual as means to express piety.[328] Certainly, because of the pantheistic nature of Stoicism, god could not be confined to a particular shape, and Stoic texts regularly denounce the problems created by anthropomorphic divine representations, *superstitio* being an important one. At the same time, the fact that divine rationality is similar to human rationality seems to have provided some support for anthropomorphic representations of the gods. Thus, although god cannot be 'conceived anthropomorphically in any physical sense […] he does resemble humans in so far as his […] rationality and its various qualities are concerned.'[329] This is how Dio Chrysostom, an author influenced by Stoicism, defends the anthropomorphic statue of Zeus created by Pheidias: only the human shape can convey Zeus' intelligence and rationality, as well as his attributes—beauty, majesty, benevolence (*Or.* 12.59, 76-77). Furthermore, Chrysostom underscores the *didactic* function of this divine representation, not only singling out the role that material visible representations of the gods play in strengthening humanity's conception of the deity (*Or.* 12.44), but also stressing its need of such statues to connect to the god and worship him (*Or.* 12.60).[330] Along similar didactic lines, Epictetus points to the proud and steady look of Pheidias' Zeus to encourage his student to become like him, steady and unperturbed (*Diss.* 2.8.15-7).

The testimony of philosophical opponents confirms this general picture. Thus, famously, Plutarch criticizes the Stoic involvement in traditional cult as one of their self-contradictions.

Moreover, it is a doctrine of Zeno's not to build temples of the gods, because a temple not worth much is also not sacred and no work of builders or mechanics is worth much. The Stoics, while applauding this as correct, attend the mysteries in temples, go up to the Acropolis, do reverence to statues, and place wreaths upon the shrines, though these are works of builders and mechanics. Yet they think that the Epicureans are confuted by the fact that they sacrifice to the gods, whereas they are themselves worse confuted by sacrificing at altars and temples which they hold do not exist and should not be built. (Plutarch, *Stoic. rep.* 1034B–C [LCL])

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[328]On this passage, Algra (2009:240) comments: 'If Seneca is here critical of an overly anthropomorphic conception of god and of the childish rituals to which it gives rise, he does not believe that a Stoic could straightforwardly advocate their rejection.' On Seneca and images, cf. also Clerc 1915:104ff.

[329]Algra 2009:144.

[330]This didactic function—especially for non-philosophers—might well explain the apparent 'inconsistency' of some Stoic philosophers with respect to some traditions.

In the literature on the Areopagus speech, this passage is often mentioned as a proof that the Stoics rejected temples, or that they were acting in self-contradiction or in tension with their own teaching when involved in the cult. But if anything, this passage suggests that the Stoics did go to temples in Plutarch's time. Furthermore, Plutarch is here providing his own interpretation of a passage from Zeno, which he took to mean that temples should be forbidden.[331] Zeno's comment, however, appears in his *Politeia*, where he describes a utopian 'city of sages,' and where, according to other sources, he thought there should be no temples or statues of the gods. His reasons for this are clarified in another source mentioning this passage, Clement of Alexandria:

> There will be no need at all to build sanctuaries. For a sanctuary that is not worth much at all should not be regarded as sacred. But the work of craftsmen and mechanics is not worth much and not sacred. (Clement, *Strom*. 5.12.76; SVF 1.264)

As this passage shows, Zeno's statement need not imply that temples or statues are always inappropriate, but rather, that they would be unnecessary in a city of wise men. As Algra comments, this is presumably due to the fact that wise men worship the gods by other means.[332] The passage thus does not constitute evidence against Stoic involvement in the cult. Certainly, the Stoics considered the cosmos or man's breast, to be the only appropriate temple for god.[333] But this does not seem to have translated into a systematic rejection of temples or traditional means of worship.

At the same time, as this passage shows, the Stoics also redefined conventional piety along philosophical lines. Like other philosophers, they claimed that piety is first of all to have the right opinion about the gods, and to imitate them. This redefinition of conventional piety is particularly well illustrated in the passage of Seneca already partly quoted above.

> It is common to instruct as to how the gods should be worshipped. But let us forbid anyone to light lamps on the Sabbath, since the gods do not need light and neither do men take pleasure in soot. Let us forbid to engage in morning salutations and to throng to the doors of temples; human desire for flattery is bribed by those services (*humana ambitio istis officiis capitur*), [but] the one who worships god is the one who knows him (*deum colit qui novit*). Let us forbid

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[331]For a discussion of this passage, see Algra 2009:238–239. My discussion relies on him.

[332]Algra 2009:239: 'We may perhaps connect this text with the doxographic testimony in Epiphanius (*Adv. Her.* 3.2.9 = *SVF* 1.146) which tells us that Zeno said we shouldn't build sanctuaries, but that we should instead have the divine solely in our mind (ἐν μόνῳ τῷ νῷ), and with the repeated claim of such later Stoics as Seneca and Epictetus that the only proper way to honour the gods is by our own spiritual attitude, i.e. by imitating them through becoming virtuous.'

[333]The Stoics believed the cosmos to be the city of gods and men (Cicero, *ND* 2.62).

bringing towels and flesh-scrapers to Jupiter, and provide mirrors to Juno; god seeks no servants (*non quaerit ministros deus*). Why not? He himself does service to mankind, everywhere and to all he is at hand to help. Although one hears what limit (or what manner: *quem modum*) he must keep in sacrifices, and how far he sould recoil from troublesome *superstitionibus* (*quam procul resilire a molestis superstitionibus*), he will never make sufficient progress, unless he conceives a right idea of god, regarding him as possessing all things (*omnia habentem*), allotting all things (*omnia tribuentem*), and bestowing them freely (*beneficum gratis*). And what reason have the gods for doing deeds of kindness (*Quae causa est dis bene faciendi*)? It is their nature. One errs if he thinks that they are unwilling to harm; they cannot. They cannot receive nor are able to inflict injury; for doing harm and to suffer harm are connected. This greatest and most beautiful nature of all has rendered incapable of inflicting ill those whom it has removed from danger.

The first way to worship the gods is to believe in them; then to give them back their majesty, to give them back their goodness (*reddere bonitatem*), without which there is no majesty. To know that they preside over the universe, control all things by their power, and that they manage the guardianship of the human race, even though they are sometimes unmindful of the individuals. They neither give nor have evil; but they do chasten and restrain certain persons, and inflict penalties, and they sometimes punish by what has the appearance of good. You wish to win over (*propitiare*) the gods? Then be a good person. Whoever imitates them, is worshipping them sufficiently. (Seneca, *Ep. 95*.49-50 [MC])

This text is often interpreted as a rejection of traditional means of worship.[334] But this is not the emphasis.[335] Rather, this passage presents a redefinition of the relationship between men and gods using the common language and paradigm of benefaction in the ancient world, and therefore reinterpreting the '*do ut des*' principle of Graeco-Roman religion.

The first part of the extract insists that practices such as lighting lamps on the Sabbath or morning salutations should be forbidden. The reason given is that the gods *do not need those services*. At this point Seneca comments that it is human ambitions which are held (*capitur*) by such services (*officiis*). This is an allusion to the relationship between benefactors and their clients, as is confirmed by the mention of morning salutations typical of this relationship. Seneca goes on forbidding bringing towels, flesh-scrapers and mirrors to the gods, because, again, god needs no servants, but he does service to mankind and he is always ready to help. What Seneca challenges here, is not traditional

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[334]E.g. Houte 2010:219; Klauck 2000:84; Jipp 2012:580.

[335]The fact that Seneca speaks of the necessity of knowing the proper measure/or manner of sacrifice (*quem modum servare in sacrificiis debeat*) itself implies that there is a proper measure for sacrifice, rather than the belief that sacrifices are totally inappropriate.

worship, at least not *in toto*, but that the god-man relationship functions like the benefactor and client system between human beings. Relationship with the gods in antiquity was indeed understood along the *do-ut-des* benefaction relationship which also defined human relationships. This relationship was based on reciprocity. Seneca denounces the view that services to the gods will win over the gods and bring their friendship and gifts or avert their anger and harm. This, he insists, is mistaken, for the gods do not need anything and do not harm.

Rather than rejecting the reciprocity and benefaction paradigm to explain how human beings are to relate to the gods, however, Seneca redefines it.[336] He thus explains the *do-ut-des* paradigm between humanity and god as a friendship of the good. Thus, rather than giving services to the gods in return for their services to mankind, men are to 'give the gods back their goodness' (*reddere bonitatem*). To be friend with the gods, one needs to become of one mind with the gods—to attune one's *logos* with the cosmic *logos*—and become like them, virtuous and fully rational. Hence Seneca's explanation that to worship the gods, one needs to know god and be a good man, imitating them. There is thus a reciprocity of relationship between god and men, but it is similar to the relationship between the wise, in that both god and the wise man benefit each other through their virtue and rationality.[337] This passage thus redefines the traditional understanding of the exchange of *beneficia*. The friendship which humanity can have with the gods is a friendship sealed by the common love of the good, virtue. Through virtue, humanity becomes like the gods and enjoys friendship with them, showing itself to be its true pupil, imitator and offspring. Thus, the good man need not to fear to be hurt by them.

> But let such matters be kept for their fitting time – all the more so, indeed, because you do not lack faith in Providence, but complain of it. I shall reconcile you with the gods, who are ever best to those who are best. For Nature never permits good to be injured by good; between good men and the gods there exists a friendship brought about by virtue.
> Friendship, do I say? Nay, rather there is a tie of relationship and a likeness, since, in truth, a good man differs from God in the element of time only; he is God's pupil, his imitator, and true offspring, whom is all-glorious parent, being no mild taskmaster of virtues, rears, as strict fathers do, with much severity. (Sen. *Prov.* 1.4–6 [LCL])

This explains why only good men can make pleasing sacrifices to the gods, since the sacrifices themselves as not considered 'good,' but only the virtue of the worshippers.

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[336]Note the language of benefaction used to describe the gods: […] *omnia habentem, omnia tribuentem, beneficum gratis. Quae causa est dis bene faciendi? Natura.*

[337]Algra 2007b:41-42. Seneca is clear that God gives benefits to all, including to the ungrateful and evil (*Ben.* 4.28.1-4), but the greatest benefits are for the virtuous.

Good men, therefore, are pleasing to the gods with an offering of meal and gruel; the bad, on the other hand, do not escape impiety although they dye the altars with streams of blood. (Sen. *Ben.* 1.6.3 [LCL])

Like the Epicureans, then, the Stoics redefined piety as the knowledge of god and his imitation: (*homoiōsis theōi*). Crucial to piety then, is to understand that the gods are good:

> In piety towards the gods, I would have you know, the chief element is this, to have right opinions about them—as existing and as administering the universe well and justly—and to have set yourself to obey them and to submit to everything that happens, and to follow it voluntarily, in the belief that it is being fulfilled by the highest intelligence. For if you act this way, you will never blame the gods, nor find fault with them for neglecting you. But this result cannot be secured in any other way than by withdrawing your idea of the good and the evil from the things which are not under our control, and in those alone. […] Wherefore, whoever is careful to exercise desire and aversion as he should, is at the same time careful about piety. (*Ench.* 31.1-4 [LCL]).

Epictetus' description of what piety entails shows that to be pious, one has to have a right notion about the gods—namely that they are provident, good and just. But to reach that conclusion in light of the apparent neglect of the gods in daily experience, one must also have a correct understanding of the true good—i.e. virtue. Only so will the Stoic sage stop blaiming the gods for being negligent, evil or harmful, and thus be truly pious. True piety is thus the opposite of *deisidaimonia*. It rejects the association of the gods with harm and evil, affirms their goodness and emulates them, thereby reaching a true friendship with the gods.

4.2.2.   Stoic theology in debate: the problems of Stoic providence

The Stoic claim that the gods are beneficent and provident was criticized both by the Epicureans and the Academics.[338] For both of their rivals, their view of providence was highly problematic. This section discusses four of their criticisms.

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[338]Plutarch and Cicero's writings provide a good insight into the polemic. On Plutarch and Stoicism, see Opsomer 2014; Hershbell 1992b; Babut 1969. On the validity of Plutarch's critique and accusation against Stoicism, see Babut 2004.

4.2.2.1. *Fate, divination and a universe full of gods as conducive to deisidaimonia*

As already mentioned, the Epicureans argued that the Stoic view of God was conducive to the fear of the gods – to *deisidaimonia*.[339] A creator god involved in the world who notices and cares about everything is terrifying—'a prying master' (Cicero, *ND* 1.55-56). Furthermore, the doctrine of necessity of the Stoics and their belief that the gods communicate with men through divination enslaves human beings to seers and oracle-mongers, in the fear of not offending the gods (*ibid*).

Similar arguments were made by the Academics, who denounced the doctrine of fate (Cicero, *Div.* 2.19) and practice of divination of the Stoics as full of *superstitio* (Cicero, *Div.* 2.83-85). Martin argues that Cicero denounces the *false* beliefs of the Stoics about the gods.[340] But the focus of the criticism seems to be the way the Stoic doctrines of fate and divination lead to a constant concern about the gods' will and thus to an aboundance of 'superstitious' practices, i.e. practices meant to conciliate the gods and avert their anger. As he explains:

> For while on the watch for these 'oracles' of yours could you be so free and calm of mind that you would have reason and not *superstitio* to guide your course? (*Div.* 2.83 [LCL])

The problem with the Stoic view of god is that this god directs and permeates everything, and thus people are led to 'interpret' everything as signs from the gods and to be constantly concerned about them.[341] Along the same line, the Academics denounced the propensity of the Stoics of identifying gods with everything (the sea, the earth, etc.) as an 'infinite cause for *superstitio*' (*ND* 3.52).[342]

4.2.2.2. *Counter-evidence: evil and injustice in the world*

The strongest argument against a good and provident god was of course the presence of much evil and injustice in the world. This argument is best illustrated by Cotta's pladoyer in the third book of the *ND*.

Challenging the Stoic assertion that the gift of reason constitutes the greatest gift and shows divine beneficence towards mankind, Cotta argues that reason is just as much used for wicked deeds as for good. In fact, malicious deeds can only be perpetrated through reason. Reason is thus as much

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[339]See 4.1.1.2.

[340]Martin 2004:128.

[341]The Academics were not against divination, nor against providence, but against the Stoic understanding of providence, which was based on an identification of the world as it is with an all-permeating divine Rationality. Indeed, such a belief had the disastrous consequences, not only of mixing the divine with matter, but above all of associating the divine will with everything which happens in the world, including evil (more on this below).

[342]*Nec illa infinita ratio superstitionis probabitur.*

responsible for the vices and disasters which plague mankind than anything good. To the Stoic answer that the gods are not to be responsible for the bad use of reason of mankind, Cotta argues that, unlike men who sometimes make gifts which are used badly but couldn't have anticipated it, the Stoic god cannot claim not to know that human beings will put reason to bad use since he foresees all things (*ND* 3.78). In other words, if god had wanted to make a gift to mankind through reason, he should have given him *virtuous* reason.

The second argument invoked by Cotta is the all-too-common injustice whereby the wicked prosper and the good men come to grief. Cotta goes on giving examples of good men touched by misfortunes and wicked and cruel men prospering. He comments that if the gods do really care for men, their verdict suggests that they do not distinguish between good and bad men. Injustice thus stands as a witness against the gods (*ND* 3.82-83). Cotta continues by listing examples of sacrilegious people who plundered temples and mocked cultic statues and were never punished by the gods for their impiety or their injustice.

Cotta then briefly addresses some of the Stoic responses to those accusations. To the Stoic argument that the gods, like human rulers, cannot take notice of everything, Cotta argues that the gods cannot have the excuse of ignorance which human kings have (*ND* 3.90). To the Stoic argument that divine retribution is sometimes exercised upon the children of the wicked, Cotta complains that this cannot be proper justice: no state would tolerate a lawgiver who sentences the son or grandson for the sins of his fathers (*ND* 3.90). Finally, to the Stoic claim that the gods do not care for individuals but only for the whole, Cotta replies that the evidence shows that the gods show no more concern for cities, tribes or nations, indeed the human race as a whole (*ND* 3.93).

4.2.2.3. *The Stoic god as cause of evil and excuse for wickedness*

Plutarch's argument against Stoic providence in his treaties takes a different form from Cotta's critique in *ND*. Rather than offering counter-evidence against the affirmation that god is beneficent and provident, he denounces the contradictions and problems of Stoic theology on its own terms. Basically, the great problem of Stoic theology is that it makes god responsible for evil.

Thus, Plutarch points to the willingness of the Stoics to attribute evils such as wars to god, while they claim those gods to be beneficent as one of their contradictions. Plutarch's argument targets the claim that wars were sometimes necessary because of an excess of population. The Stoics indeed claimed that some evil in the world is necessary. Plutarch, however, complains that a good god should have prevented overpopulation in the first place rather than destroying human beings (*Stoic. rep.* 1049A-D). Furthermore, attributing wars to god makes him responsible for human vices, since wars are caused by human lust or greed. Here again he sees a contradiction in that the Stoics affirm that god is not responsible for shameful things (1049 D-E). For Plutarch, Chrysippus makes the gods responsible for human vices rather than human beings themselves because everything happens 'not

merely of necessity or according to destiny but also in conformity with god's reason and with the best nature' (1049F-1050D [LCL]).

Despite this, the Stoics say that the gods chastise evil. This however, is a contradiction because the gods would thus chastise what they are themselves responsible for, or an evil which is useful in the greater scheme of things (1050D-1051A). Plutarch denounces at length and with much sarcasm the Stoic view that vice and evil are necessary to the universe, or that when evil happens to virtuous men it is because some things are entrusted by providence to base spirits as some charges are neglected in larger households.

4.2.2.4.   *The triviality of the benefits of the Stoic god*

Finally, Plutarch attacks another self-contradiction of Stoic theology by pointing out that if the only 'good' in the world is virtue, and everything else is indifferent to the wise, then the Stoic god does not really give 'meaningful' benefits to mankind or the wise. Indeed, things such as wealth or health are not really goods according to the Stoics, but trivialities. There is thus no meaningful gift exchange happening between the wise and god if virtue is the only good, for virtue is precisely what god does not give to humanity, but what it has to strive for (*Stoic. rep.*1048).

4.2.2.5.   *Conclusions*

Not all the accusations mentioned above were legitimate. For example, Plutarch overlooks that the Stoics were compatibilists and held to a sophisticated view in which moral responsibility was compatible with the fact that vice plays a role in the overall structure of the universe.[343] Furthermore, the Stoics provided answers to those criticisms, in particular to the question of evil, by developing several lines of arguments in their theodicy.[344] What those accusations show, however, is that while their diagnosis and criticism of *deisidaimonia* was similar to that of the Epicureans and the Platonists, the theology the Stoics offered as a solution to it was accused, ironically, of threatening the goodness of god and his benefits, and being conducive to *deisidaimonia*.

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[343]Opsomer 2014:93. On Stoic compatibilism, see Bobzien 1998.

[344]On the Stoic treatment of evil, cf. Long 1968; Kerferd 1977-1978; Frede 2002; Algra 2003; Liebersohn 2012; Opsomer 2014.

4.3. Conclusions

The aim of this chapter was to identify what the Epicureans and the Stoics in early Post-Hellenistic times[345] understood by the terminology of *deisidaimonia* (or *superstitio*), why they criticized it, and how this related to their attitude towards traditional religion and piety. This conclusion synthesizes those results in light of previous research, and highlights the importance of this context to interpret Acts 17.

4.3.1. The philosophical criticism of *deisidaimonia* in early Post-Hellenistic times

4.3.1.1. *The meaning of* deisidaimonia

First, Epicurean and Stoic philosophers use *deisidaimonia*/*superstitio* with the meaning 'fear of the gods,' or occasionally, by metonymy, to refer to practices and beliefs which either reflect such fears – i.e. apotropaic activities meant to avert divine hostility – or are conducive to such fears – e.g. some tales or traditions implying harmful, evil or immoral gods. As in the last chapter then, the criticism of *deisidaimonia* does not focus on particular cultic practices or beliefs *per se*, but on an emotion and the actions and beliefs which are the result – or generative – of this fear.

As this chapter has shown, Epicureans and Stoics also associate *deisidaimonia* with the same contexts and situations as Plutarch, Diodorus, Strabo and Josephus: events or phenomena which might suggest divine hostility (eclipses, thunderbolt, sickness, dreams, etc.), or infringement of cultic or 'moral' law (breaking an oath, stilling sacred gold, wickedness or injustice, etc.).

Importantly, then, both philosophical and non-philosophical authors refer to the same phenomenon when they use *deisidaimonia*. It is thus misleading to say, as Martin does, that the philosophers—or even the intellectual elite—'invented' *deisidaimonia*.[346] As argued in the previous chapter, *deisidaimonia* was a logical entailment of the nature of Graeco-roman religion, and the cult – which aimed to ensure the *pax deorum* – was the normal way to deal with such fears. The philosophers did not invent it nor were they the only ones who noticed it: it was there all along, intrinsically bound to a worldview in which the world is full of more or less powerful gods who can be friends or enemies. And while only the Epicureans argued that *deisidaimonia* is one of the two roots of all the problems of humanity, the Stoics and Plutarch found it widespread and wrote against it. Thus, for Plutarch, *deisidaimonia* is a feeling which most people experiment towards the gods, especially when they participate in religious festivals (*Suav. viv.* 1101DE). This feeling of fear, however, is in the majority of people mixed with good hopes to be helped by the gods and joy to be in their presence, and this, for Plutarch at least, balances its negative effect. The Platonist is clear,

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[345]According to Van Nuffelen (2011:1), the 'Post-Hellenistic period' ranges from the first century BCE to the second century CE.

[346]Martin 2004:226.

however, that only the few wise do not experience *deisidaimonia* and that this is the ideal to which one should aspire. What the philosophers did, therefore, is attempting to provide a philosophical solution to eliminate it so that people could reach the telos of *eudaimonia* and have peace with the gods.

4.3.1.2. *The heart of the criticism of* deisidaimonia

Second, and against much previous scholarship, this chapter suggests that the heart of the philosophical critique of *deisidaimonia* was theological. Whether the Epicureans, the Stoics or the Platonist Plutarch, they all identify the origin of *deisidaimonia* in ignorance about the gods – namely misunderstanding their nature. The fundamental mistake of *deisidaimonia* is that it associates the gods with evil and harm. To quote Plutarch:

> The former [the atheists] do not see the gods at all, and the latter [those fearing the gods— δεισιδαίμονας] believe that they are evil. The former disregard them, and the latter conceive their kindliness to be frightful, their fatherly solicitude to be despotic, their provident care to be injurious, their lack of anger to be savage and brutal. […] And in short, atheism is an indifferent feeling towards the divine, which does not apprehend the good (μὴ νοοῦσα τὸ ἀγαθόν), and *deisidaimonia* is a multitude of feelings which consider the good to be evil (κακὸν τὸ ἀγαθὸν ὑπονοοῦσα). (*Superst.* 167D–E [MC])

The fundamental cause of *deisidaimonia* is thus a mistaken theological—or physical, since theology is part of physics—judgment about reality. And for all three schools (if Plutarch is representative of the Platonists), this mistaken judgment is both impious—for it associates the gods with evil—and dramatic for mankind because it maintains it in a state of 'slavery'—a terminology which is again found in the different Hellenistic schools.

Admittedly the literature surveyed in the present chapter remains limited and further study will be necessary to confirm this conclusion, but in the texts examined, fundamentally, Hellenistic philosophers denounced *deisidaimonia* not because it represented a piety which was excessive, embarrassing, unworthy of their social status, foreign or associated with the private cult rather than public worship, but because it reflected a false judgment about the nature of the gods, which both insulted the gods and threw mankind into the slavery of fear and even wicked and shameful practices to avoid the gods' wrath.

As to their solution to this problem and the way human beings can get rid of this sickness, again, the Epicureans, the Stoics and the Platonist Plutarch are united: human beings need to learn the truth about the gods, and this truth fundamentally entails that the gods are not involved or responsible for evil. At the very heart of the philosophical answer to *deisidaimonia* is thus the belief that the gods are good and just, and not responsible for evil. Theodicy, and demonstration of divine goodness and

justice, thus had an important place in the philosophical argument against *deisidaimonia*.[347] And it is at this point that the Stoics, the Epicureans and the Platonists departed from each other and argued with each other, for while they agreed that the divine is not (ultimately!) evil, they had a very different understanding of the way the divine interacts with the world and human beings, a view which was precisely the result of their distanciation of the divine from evil.[348]

4.3.1.3.   A debated and polemical subject

What this chapter also highlights, therefore, is that while Epicureans, Stoics and Platonists were in agreement about the impiety and 'irrationality' of *deisidaimonia*,[349] they were in strong disagreement about the theology which provided a solution to it. Providing a convincing answer to the fear of evil gods necessitated dealing with questions of divine justice and goodness, and as the writings of Philodemus, Cicero and Plutarch show, this was a central and hotly debated subject among the schools. Thus, in an ironic turn, the Stoics and the Platonists were able to denounce the Epicureans as destroying piety, justice and the excellence of god while they eliminated *deisidaimonia*, while the Epicureans and the Platonists criticized the Stoics for supporting a theology which they argued compromised the goodness of god and contributed to *deisidaimonia*.

This draws attention to an important feature of Hellenistic philosophy at the time which concerns us, namely its polemical and competitive nature. As Trapp comments concerning *philosophia* in the Imperial Age:

> It was made up instead, as it had been since the later fourth century BCE, of a multiplicity of reciprocally critical schools of thought (*haireseis*, *sectate*), each with its own version of the truth about reality, human nature, and happiness, and its own corresponding modulation of the philosophic life, propounded and defended in vigorous reciprocal polemic with its competitors.[350]

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[347]In his study Martin rightly highlights the importance that the belief in good gods has in the philosophical criticism of *deisidaimonia*. He fails, however, to acknowledge the complexity of the philosophical argumentation when he calls this belief the 'Grand Optimal Illusion' because, as he explains, ancient thinkers had 'no new "data," "facts," or "evidence" from nature that could have demonstrated its truth.' (2004:227). As this chapter shows, not only *did* some philosophers attempt to demonstrate this belief from nature (the Stoics), but all philosophers were perfectly aware of the difficulties involved in claiming the (ultimate) goodness of the gods and had developed a philosophy and arguments which aimed to deal with those difficulties. A similar criticism is made by Gordon (2006:524-525) in his review of Martin.

[348]Plutarch does believe in evil demons, but he still emphasizes the goodness of the divine hierarchy. For a discussion of how he can maintain a critic of *deisidaimonia* in this context, cf. Van Nuffelen 2011b.

[349]'irrationality' is to be understood as 'in opposition to reality' in this context.

[350]Trapp 2014:50.

This sectarian and polemical outlook remained the dominant philosophical mode in the first centuries CE, as the surviving literature from this period attests: so, Epictetus attacks Academics and Epicureans from a Stoic perspective, Diogenes of Oenanda decries Stoics and Platonists from an Epicurean point of view and Plutarch denounces the self-contradictions of Epicureans and Stoics.[351] As Stowers puts it, '[t]he Hellenistic philosophies conceived themselves as distinct and mutually exclusive *haeresis*, choices, or sects.'[352] This polemical and exclusive outlook, rather than eclecticism or an attempt to seek common ground, dominated the philosophical landscape when Luke wrote Acts 17, and will have important consequences on the way we interpret its use of philosophical arguments.[353]

4.3.2. Stoic and Epicurean philosophers on traditional religion and piety

4.3.2.1.   Attitude towards traditional religion

As mentioned above, the philosophical criticism of *deisidaimonia* was not synonymous with the criticism of traditional religion or practices. Indeed, another element highlighted by this chapter with significant consequences for the interpretation of the pericope in Acts 17 is that both Epicurean and Stoic philosophers did not reject the traditional cult, not even its use of divine images.[354] Certainly, some philosophers were probably more critical of the cult than others, and Lucretius or Seneca might well have been more vocal against it than Philodemus or Epictetus respectively. But the evidence given both by the philosophers and their philosophical rivals suggests that they did not oppose the cult in toto and engaged in it.

Not only so, but as some recent studies have suggested, the Epicureans, the Stoics and a Platonist like Plutarch saw in religion and some religious practices the reflection of deep philosophical truth about the divine and the nature of things and sometimes even a positive

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[351]Trapp 2014:51,

[352]Stowers 2001:89,

[353]It is Eduard Zeller, who, in his influencial *Die Philosophie der Griechen in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (1869-82) popularized the idea that eclecticism dominated philosophy between the first century BC and Plotinus. Recent scholarship, however, has challenged several aspects of his thesis (see especially Dillon and Long 1988), noting in particular that most philosophers during this period still maintained an allegiance to a single tradition (Hatzimichali 2011:14). Thus, in an article published in 1989, Sedley concluded that apart from the 'curious individual' called Potamo of Alexandria, 'no ancient philosopher is an eclectic' (118-119). For a study of Potamo, the only philosopher who seems to have been a self-conscious eclectic, see Hatzimichali 2011.

[354]Martin (2004) totally overlooks this state of affairs in his analysis. Hence Gordon (2006:525) criticizes Martin for not mentioning that all philosophical schools, apart from the Cynics, accommodated the civic cult, and that the Stoics defended civic religion as an approximation of truth.

reinforcement of those truths upon the human mind.[355] Thus, as discussed earlier, the Epicureans encouraged participation in the cult with a correct Epicurean view of the gods to reach ataraxia. And the Stoics argued that tradition contained some truth because of human preconceptions about the gods, and, although they denounced the errors to which anthropomorphic representations of the gods led, some of them at least, seem to have found some validity in such representations because of the 'kinship' between men and the divine.

Having said that, the philosophers did criticize and reject certain aspects of traditional 'religion.' Typically, the Epicureans rejected divination or a 'crass' interpretation of the myths as incompatible with their view of non-interventionist gods. The Stoics denounced literal interpretations of the myths, the mistaken *identification* of the gods with their statues and the problems of anthropomorphism. Importantly for our purposes, the present analysis also highlights that the philosophers clearly identify certain myths and practices as conducive to *deisidaimonia*, because they encourage the belief that the gods are evil and harmful. In particular anthropomorphic representations of the gods, both in myths and statues are regularly singled out as strengthening *deisidaimonia*, since they imply that the gods have human passions. The passage from Plutarch's *De superstitione* quoted earlier, seems to echo this diagnostic. The full text reads:

> The former [the atheists] do not see the gods at all, and the latter [those fearing the gods—δεισιδαίμονας] believe that they are evil. […] Then again, such persons give credence to workers in copper, sculptors of stone and modellers of wax who make statues of the gods in the likeness of human beings (ἀνθρωπόμορφα τῶν θεῶν τὰ εἴδη), and they have such images fashioned, and dress them up, and worship them. But they hold in contempt philosophers and statesmen, who try to prove that the dignity of god is associated with goodness, magnanimity, good will, and solicitude. (*Superst*. 167D–E [MC])

This passage does *not* represent a rejection of anthropomorphic images.[356] Indeed Plutarch is generally not opposed to the use of images of the gods, although he denounces the assimilation of the

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[355]On Plutarch's belief that traditional beliefs, myths and practices were sources of knowledge when philosophically interpreted, cf. Ferrari 2005:14; Hisch-Luispold 2014. On religion being a source of knowledge for philosophers in post-Hellenistic times, cf. Van Nuffelen 2011: 4-10. See also Algra (2009:227), who argues that 'one of the recurrent themes in the polemics between Stoics and Epicureans in the first century BC […] is the extent to which each of these schools was able to make sense of, or to salvage, the tradition –be it the sociopolitical or the religious tradition.'

[356]Cf. Van Nuffelen 2011:69. On Plutarch and images: Graf 2005; on Plutarch's religion more generally: Hirsch-Luipold 2014.

statues of the gods with the gods themselves.[357] Rather this passage denounces the deleterious effect those images have on humanity if they are interpreted as representations of the real nature of the gods. In this case, the implication seems to be that anthropomorphic divine representations lead to or strengthen *deisidaimonia*, probably because gods in the likeness of human beings can be petty, angry and wicked.

4.3.2.2. *Piety as right knowledge of the divine and godlikeness*

Moving to their teaching about piety, both Epicurean and Stoic philosophers argued that the gods do not *need* the services of mankind, such as the building of houses or sacrifices. This, however, does not seem to have led them to a rejection of all temples and sacrifices altogether. It did, however, lead them to a re-interpretation of the way humanity can have a relationship with the gods and a new understanding of the '*do ut des*' principle with the gods. Thus, the Epicureans reinterpreted the harms and benefits given by the gods along psychological lines: the wicked is harmed by his view of gods who, like him, harm and will harm him possibly eternally in the after-life; the righteous, however, is benefited by his view of gods like himself, who are righteous and will not harm him. And the Stoics reinterpreted friendship with god as a friendship of the good, with the wise and virtuous benefiting most from god's goodness.

The philosophers then still understood the relationship between human beings and the gods along the lines of a certain reciprocity. This ensured that the gods played a role in preserving justice, giving retribution and rewards to people as they deserved. Furthermore, this reciprocity often took the form of the gods 'treating' people the way they themselves behaved. Thus, for the Epicureans, the wicked are hurt by their view of 'wicked' and 'harmful gods,' while the righteous is not harmed by his view of unharmful gods. And for the Stoics, it is the virtuous who most benefits from god's virtue.

Furthermore, piety was, above all, for both Stoic and Epicurean philosophers (and indeed the Platonists), to have a right opinion about the gods – i.e. about their nature – and then to imitate them as much as possible, becoming like them. Indeed, both philosophical schools, like the Platonists, believed that true piety is expressed above all in imitation of the gods and godlikeness. Importantly, whether it meant believing that the gods are not moved by *ira* or *gratia* and do not interfer in the world (Epicureans), or that the gods express their excellence in *gratia* and providence (Stoics), in both cases it implied embracing that the divine does not harm and is uninvolved in evil. And since piety was expressed by becoming like god, through right reasoning, but also through ethical emulation, piety also meant being righteous and nor harming anyone (Epicureans), and being good and virtuous (Stoics) like the gods. Piety (*eusebeia*) then *was* indeed, as the philosophers had concluded, the antithesis of *deisidaimonia*.

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[357]See especially *Is. Os.* 379C-D.

Consequently, although both Epicurean and Stoic philosophers taught that the cultic traditions received by the ancestors were generally to be followed, they emphasized the necessity to do so with a correct view of the gods for it to be true and useful piety.

CHAPTER FIVE: SOMETHING NEW IN ATHENS – Godlikeness, piety and divine justice in light of the resurrection (Acts 17:22-31)

The present chapter analyses the argument of the speech in Acts 17:22-31 in light of the religious and philosophical contexts discussed in the previous chapters. To facilitate this analysis, it is divided into four sections each focusing on a portion of the speech. The first part discusses the *proemium* of the speech which introduces the subject of the discourse (vv. 22-23). The second section analyses the main body of the argument until v. 28 (vv. 24-28), while a third section is devoted to the examination of verse 29. Finally, the last section examines the conclusion of the speech in verses 30-31.

5.1. Introducing the subject: *deisidaimonia* and the unknown god (17:22-23)

5.1.1. The altar to the unknown god and the concern about hostile gods

Exegetes who have taken δεισιδαιμονεστέρους as a criticism in Paul's discourse have usually interpreted it as a denunciation of the 'superstitious' idolatry or polytheism of the Athenians.[358] But as argued in the preceding chapters, *deisidaimonia* was not specifically associated with idolatry or a particular religious practice, nor did it simply describe any form of 'perverted, false or superstitious religion.' Rather, it referred to the fear or concern to avert divine hostility or wrath and maintain peace with the gods. When the philosophers criticized *deisidaimonia* then, they were not targeting the worship of idols specifically, although they *did* point out that images played an important role in leading to *deisidaimonia* when not interpreted appropriately and denounced the excess of religious practices to which *deisidaimonia* could lead.

The speech thus begins by pointing out that the Athenians are seemingly (cf. ὡς) very concerned about preventing divine hostility and maintaining a good relationship with the gods, and refers to the altar to the unknown god as evidence of such extreme concern: '…I *even* (καί) found an altar upon which it is written: to an unknown god.' (23). As explained earlier, such altars reflect a concern not to overlook any god and avert actual or potential hostility and harm from an offended deity. The description of the city of Athens as full of idols (16: κατείδωλον) further demonstrates this preoccupation. As the discussion in chapter three has also shown, it is unnecessary to interpret this characterization as a mockery of the Athenians. The term *deisidaimōn* is first of all descriptive of a very common attitude in Graeco-Roman religion, namely the concern to avoid the hostility and wrath

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[358]Rowe 2011:39: 'As Luke tells it, Paul does not think that the Athenians are particularly pious but exceptionally superstitious—or in Jewish theological language, idolatrous.' cf. Gärtner 1955:238; Jipp 2012:576-7.

of the gods, and it need not imply either that the Athenians are constantly anxious about or terrorized by the gods.

The attitude of the Athenians thus provides an entry point to Luke's discourse, and also opens up the thematic of the speech: the relationship between human beings and the divine. As discussed in the previous chapters, it was the purpose of traditional religion to maintain the *pax deorum*. Likewise, the Stoics and the Epicureans provided their own teaching on the way to maintain a relationship with the gods characterized by peace, and even love and friendship in the case of the Stoics.

At the same time, verse 23 suggests a problem with Athenian worship: indeed, as Luke puts it, the Athenians are worshipping ignorantly (ἀγνοοῦντες). The association of *deisidaimonia* with ignorance echoes the diagnostic of both Epicurean and Stoic philosophers – the two sects with which Paul has been interacting just before the speech – on the question. As discussed in the last chapter, both schools argued that the wise who through philosophy has a right knowledge of the gods and imitates them is not affected by *deisidaimonia* but has a relationship with the gods characterized by peace or friendship. Understanding the nature of the gods was thus crucial to worship them properly and have peace with them.

The beginning of the speech therefore shows that the apostle tackles a 'religious concern' of the Athenians which the philosophers also aimed to address. According to the philosophers, however, Paul is proposing a 'new teaching' on this question (cf. καινὴ διδαχή in v.19). In so far as the apostle is depicted as addressing a topic discussed and debated by the philosophers and echoing their terminology (ignorance), Luke certainly characterizes Paul as a philosophical 'rival' of the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers. Whether the characterization of the Athenians as δεισιδαιμονεστέρους is also ironic because it highlights a failure of the philosophers to eliminate what they aimed to eradicate is more difficult to assess since the audience of the speech and the Athenians generally were not all philosophers. While it is possible that Luke might want to draw attention to the philosophers' lack of success in convincing their compatriots, it is doubtful that philosophers would have felt responsible for the failure of their contemporaries to apply successfully their teaching and get rid of *deisidaimonia*.

5.1.2. The unknown god and the subject of the speech

Having pointed to the 'problem' or 'concern' of Athenian worship, verse 23 then announces the subject (*propositio*) of Paul's proclamation: 'what you worship ignorantly, this I am announcing to you.'

Acts 17:23 διερχόμενος γὰρ καὶ ἀναθεωρῶν τὰ σεβάσματα ὑμῶν εὗρον καὶ βωμὸν ἐν ᾧ ἐπεγέγραπτο· Ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ. **ὃ οὖν ἀγνοοῦντες εὐσεβεῖτε, τοῦτο ἐγὼ καταγγέλλω ὑμῖν**.

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It is hard to underestimate the hermeneutical importance of v. 23 to understand the argument of the speech: what is Paul announcing and how does it relate to current Athenian worship?[359] Rhetorically speaking, verse 23 forms the conclusion of the *exordium*, whose purpose is, according to Aristotle, to 'either excite or remove prejudice, and magnify or minimize the importance of the subject' of the speech.[360] Exegetes thus commonly understand verse 23 as Paul's attempt to remove the suspicion that he is importing new deities to the city (v.18) by connecting his proclamation to an Athenian altar. The consensus of scholarship throughout history has been that the object of Paul's speech is to make known the unknown god to the Athenians, whom Paul then introduces as the Lord of heaven and earth in v. 24.

> It is evident that by employing poetic examples from the *Phaenomen*a of Aratus, [Paul] approves of the well-spoken words of the Greeks and discloses that through the 'unknown God' the Creator God [τὸν δημιουργὸν θεόν] was in the roundabout way honoured by the Greeks' (Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.19).[361]

> Die Anknüpfung ist hier eine bewusste. Die Rede knüpft ja an die Inschrift eines heidnischen Altares an: ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ – sie setzt also bei den Hörern eine Ahnung von dem wahren Gott voraus, der ihnen nun erst wirklich bekannt gemacht werden soll. 'Was ihr, ohne es zu kennen, verehrt, das verkündige ich euch.' Gleich die ersten Sätze tragen hellenistische Gotteslehre vor, beginnend freilich im alttestamentlichen Stile mit der Verkündigung des einen Gottes, der als der Schöpfer keines Tempels zu seiner Verehrung bedarf. (Bultmann 1946:410)

> The singular version only of the inscription could be used by the speaker on the Areopagus, however, for he regarded the inscription as evidence of the Athenians' subconscious awareness of the true God. Now he can begin straight away to proclaim this God. (Dibelius 1939:41)

> Still, this altar shows that Paul introduces no 'new gods': the accusation raised against Socrates cannot validly be made against Christianity. Out of the ignorance of the Athenians concerning this God, it inevitably follows that Paul must proclaim him. (Haenchen 1971:521)

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[359]So Weiser (1985:468): 'Der Interpretation des Verses 23 kommt für das Verständnis der *ganzen* Rede sowie ihrer theologischen und geistesgeschichtlichen Beurteilung eine Schlüsselstellung zu. Wie schätzt Lukas die *religiöse* Situation der Athener ein? Wie beurteilt er das, was sie bereits *haben*, und das, was ihnen *mangelt* und was durch das paulinische "Angebot" behoben werden soll?'

[360]Arist. *Rh*. 3.14.12 (1415b 37-38), quoted in Zweck 1989:96.

[361]Quoted in Rowe 2011:35.

Er knüpft an das Thema an, um den Monotheismus zu proklamieren. Dieser unbekannte Gott, den sie neben anderen Götter verehren, v 16, ist in Wirklichkeit der einzige Gott. Die Aufschrift wird zum Ausgangspunkt für die Verkündigung des einen Gottes, des Gottes Israels. (Jervell 1998:446)

More significant is Paul's attempt to tie this inscription together with a theology of creation. Given the charge of 'newness,' it is unsurprising that Luke depicts Paul's first argumentative move as an effort to rebuff this charge. 'What you worship unknowingly,' this I proclaim to you.' I do not, implies Paul, bring in anything new at all. Rather, the one to whom I testify has preceded me here in Athens. (Rowe 2011:40)

Many extracts could be added, but those suffice to illustrate that this reading has had an extraordinary longevity and that it is held by a large spectrum of scholars with very different interpretations of the speech and its relationship to natural theology.[362] Athenian self-acknowledged ignorance about the unknown god of the altar thus provides Paul with an entry point (*Anknüpfungspunkt*) to begin his speech, while enabling the apostle to refute the charge of newness. He then proceeds to present this unknown god who is identified with the creator (v.24). To confirm this reading, as mentioned by Dibelius, exegetes also sometimes point to the singular of the inscription: Ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ. Since so far no such inscription has been found in the singular form, it is argued that Luke has transformed it to serve his purpose of introducing the true God to the Athenians.[363]

This *Anknüpfungspunkt,* however, has led to different conclusions about Luke's assessment of Athenian religiosity. Most exegetes see it as an indication that there is at least *something* positive in the Athenians' attitude, even if it needs correction or even repentance. Thus, for Haenchen, Luke depicts the Athenians in an ambiguous position:

Paul concludes from this devotion that the heathen live at one and the same time in a positive and negative relationship with the right God: they worship him and yet do not know him—they worship him indeed, but along with many other gods![364]

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[362]Compare, for example, Dibelius, Jervell and Rowe's interpretation. Similar claims can be found in: Zweck 1989:103; Porter 1999:119; Barrett 2004:839; Pervo 2008:433; Schnabel 2014:178.

[363]E.g., Pervo 2008:433, who points to Jerome who corrects the text and comments that in reality such inscriptions were in the plural (*Comm. in Titum* 1:12). See, however, Horst's discussion of the evidence. He concludes that it cannot be excluded that inscriptions in the singular might have existed (Horst 1990:1451).

[364]Haenchen 1971:521.

Wilson speaks for many when he writes: 'Luke thinks the Gentiles' basic response [is] correct but misguided.'[365] More critical is Rowe, who underscores that Athenian worship is problematic because it is *in ignorance*.[366]

Those interpretations, however, create a tension in the narrative which has puzzled other interpreters. Indeed, by linking the unknown god worshipped by the Athenians with Paul's God, Luke seems to put the creator God on the same level as the other gods worshipped by the Athenians. As Barrett notes concerning the inscription: 'This, even in the singular, implies polytheism.'[367] Such a reading is in tension with the wider context of the speech and in particular with Paul's anger at idols in v. 16. Even exegetes who interpret the speech in conciliatory terms have noticed this strange contrast. Thus, many years ago Dibelius wrote: 'the difference in tone between 17.6 and 17.22 is bound to strike the reader of Acts.'[368] The attempt of some exegetes to explain this difference in tone in terms of a *captatio benevolentiae* in v.22 hardly solves the issue,[369] and some interpreters have gone as far as qualifying the apostle's strategy as 'intriguing,' shocking or even deceptive.[370]

In light of such tension, some exegetes have concluded that Paul's mention of the altar to the unknown god is simply an *ad hoc* move, and that the altar provides him with a useful place to begin his speech, while raising the interest of his audience. For example, Barrett writes:

> […] it is important not to give too heavy a theological treatment to Paul's (Luke's) sentence; it must be understood as a preacher's *ad hoc* way of introducing his theme, and it would be unfair to hold him bound to all the theological implications of his illustration. The Athenians

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[365]Wilson 1973:214.

[366]Rowe 2011:41 (his emphasis).

[367]Barrett (2004:838) goes on saying that 'the speaker makes it monotheist,' but this is precisely what is arguably problematic.

[368]Dibelius 1939:66; cf. Conzelmann 1966:219.

[369]Contra Conzelmann 1966:219.

[370]Porter 1999:119: 'This is an intriguing logical manoeuvre on Paul's part. Paul clearly has in mind the introduction of his God. However, in the way he states the case, it appears at first as if he sees this God as only one of a number of gods, and that he is simply filling in a blank that is still left in the pantheon.' For Baur (1876:177-178), this link to the unknown god 'violates the truth' and shows the lack of historicity of the account: 'in this case how can we overlook the fact that the Apostle must have been guilty of open violation of the truth if he declared this very God to be the One whom he preached, the true God, the Creator of heaven and earth? If he were only "an unknown God," he would not be distinguished from the rest of the known gods by his individual character, but only by the accidental circumstances that his name was not known, or that no special name had been given him; he would be one of the same class with the rest of the deities of the polytheistic faith, from whom the true God of monotheism is different in every essential point, and it is evident that there may quite as well be several unknown gods of this sort as one.'

(those of them who were religiously rather than sceptically disposed) reverenced a considerable number of gods. The preacher could have made a note of many other σεβάσματα bearing the names of particular gods; he picked out this god, whose name was not given because it was not known, as the one whom, to the exclusion of all the others, he intended to proclaim.[371]

Such an *ad hoc* move seems to be also implied by Marshall, who emphasizes however that there was no connection at all between the unknown god whom the Athenian worshiped and Paul's God.

> One such had particularly occupied Paul's attention: a wayside altar with the inscription to *an unknown god*. He eagerly seized on this inscription as a way of introducing his own proclamation of *the* unknown God. There was, to be sure, no real connection between 'an unknown god' and the true God; Paul hardly meant that his audience were unconscious worshippers of the true God. Rather, he is drawing their attention to the true God who was ultimately responsible for the phenomena which they attributed to an unknown god. […].[372]

But the suggestion that the Paul of Luke's narrative would make an *ad hoc* move by linking an altar in a city full of idols to the true God does not sit well with the narrative of Acts where Christians systematically condemn idolatry to the point of putting their life in danger (Acts 14:8-19; 19:23-27). The connection of the altar to the unknown god with Athenian idolatrous polytheistic worship is made clear in the narrative in that Paul mentions the 'altar of the unknown god' as just one example among other cultic monuments which angered him: … I *even* found an altar upon which it is written (cf. ἀναθεωρῶν τὰ σεβάσματα ὑμῶν εὗρον καὶ βωμὸν ἐν ᾧ ἐπεγέγραπτο· Ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ). It is also noteworthy that the word βωμός used by Luke is a term traditionally used in connection of illegitimate worship in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.[373] Although this is not an absolute

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[371]Barrett 2004:839.

[372]Marshall 1980:286.

[373]The great majority of times, it is explicitly associated with idol worship. It is also used for the altars of Balaam (Num 23), or the altar set up by the tribes of Reuben and Gad (Jos 22). The only place where it is used of God's altar is in Num 3:10. But it is in the context of an 'outsider' approaching the altar and being put to death. Horst (1990:1452) comments: 'The single occurrence of βωμός in Acts 17:23 is in sharp contrast to the 23 times θυσιαστήριον occurs in the New Testament. This has its background in the LXX. Whereas the LXX translators freely use pagan cultic terminology to designate objects and persons of the Israelite cult, in the case of the word for altar they differentiate. […] Whereas Jewish contemporaries of the New Testament authors like Philo and Josephus do not follow the LXX in this matter and freely use βωμός for the altar in the Jerusalem temple, the NT keeps strictly to this usage and uses βωμός only here.' Luke otherwise uses θυσιαστήριον twice, both times to refer to God's altar (Lk 1:11; 11:51).

proof that Luke uses it with negative connotations, for some Hellenistic Jewish writers did use this word to refer to the altar in Jerusalem, it is surprising that Luke would have chosen such a word in light of the important role the LXX plays in his writings. Rowe's emphasis on Athenian ignorance is important, for, as he points out, Paul's allusion to Athenian ignorance is hardly a compliment.[374] But it still suggests that the Athenians did somehow worship Paul's God, a reading in tension with v. 16.

The suggestion defended here is that the speech does not claim to introduce the unknown god of the altar to the Athenians, much less to present him as the Lord of heaven and earth. Indeed, such interpretations are problematic both grammatically and narratively.

A first indicator raising questions for the common interpretation is the lack of grammatical correspondence between the masculine ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ and the object of Paul's proclamation which is identified by neuter pronouns: ὃ οὖν ἀγνοοῦντες εὐσεβεῖτε, **τοῦτο** ἐγὼ καταγγέλλω ὑμῖν.[375] Few exegetes comment on this lack of agreement. Dupont, however, suggests that this shows an attempt to prevent an exact identification between the object of Paul's proclamation from the unknown god worshipped by the Athenians.[376] Another detail which casts doubt on a direct correlation between the 'unknown god' and the subject of the speech in this sentence is that rather than announcing that he will proclaim the 'unknown god' [ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ], Paul talks about 'unknowing Athenians' [ἀγνοοῦντες]. This, combined with the move from a masculine noun to a neuter pronoun, seems to suggest that the altar to the unknown god is taken as a sign of the Athenian ignorant condition, or their ignorant worship. The altar to the unknown god is thus mentioned because it is symptomatic of the ignorance which characterizes Athenian worship (cf. 'I *even* saw an altar to an unknown god'), and their failure to worship appropriately and thus have peace with the gods; the speech thus aims to proclaim what the Athenians are revering (εὐσεβεῖτε) in ignorance more generally.

In addition, and importantly, exegetes have also been too quick in identifying the object of Paul's proclamation (τοῦτο καταγγέλλω) with the God who made the world spoken about starting in v.24. Indeed, there has been an incredibly long and unwavering consensus in scholarship that the

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[374]Cf. Chapter 4. Both Stoics and Epicureans considered ignorance as the root of all evils.

[375]This is the reading of the earliest manuscripts; but the difficulty generated by this formulation is reflected by the substituted masculine pronouns found in many other witnesses (ὃν...τοῦτον). As most commentators note, the earliest and harder reading is likely original, and the masculine forms are readily explained grammatically by the antecedent of the relative pronoun which is usually thought to be θεῷ. Barrett 2004:838.

[376]Dupont 1979:419: 'Fortement accentué, le neutre des deux pronoms a pour effet d'établir un écran entre le dieu inconnu adoré par les Athéniens et le Dieu que Paul annonce. L'un n'est pas l'autre ; vis-à-vis de l'un comme de l'autre, les Athéniens sont dans l'ignorance, une ignorance qui concerne "quelque chose" à adorer.' Pervo (2008:433), Johnson (1992:315) and Haenchen (1971:521) do not comment on the neuter; Marguerat (2015:157) explains it by suggesting that Paul is talking not about a new god, but about the nature of the divine.

subject of the speech is the presentation of Yahweh—the God who made heaven and earth—to the Athenians. But this is problematic in light of the grammar and the narrative context.

Again, the first problem with this interpretation is the lack of grammatical agreement between the object of Paul's message (τοῦτο) with the masculine ὁ θεός which is the subject of verse 24. In fact, the speech here seems to set apart this creator God from what the Athenians worship ignorantly by saying: 'the God who made the world and everything in it, *this one* [οὗτος]…does not dwell in temples made by human hands.'[377] There is in fact, no *a priori* reason to identify the object of καταγγέλλω in v. 23 as the God who created heaven and earth mentioned in v. 24.

A further feature of the dramatic setting of this pericope corroborates this interpretation. Indeed, at no point is there a sign that the Athenians perceived Paul to be the messenger of the Jewish God—Yahweh. Rather they perceive Paul to be either a *spermologos* or a messenger of foreign divinit*ies* (in the plural!), and later speak of a new teaching (v.19). Even if there is some kind of misunderstanding going on here, it is highly unlikely that the Athenians, particularly philosophically sensitive and learned Athenians, would have perceived the presentation of the Jewish God Yahweh as a new teaching. Indeed, Luke has indicated that there was a synagogue in Athens, attended by God-fearers, which suggests a certain success of Judaism among locals. He also describes the Athenians as preoccupied with novelty (vv. 17, 21). The audience would thus have been aware of the basic beliefs about the Jewish God and would have associated Paul's message with Jewish teaching if the object of his proclamation was Yahweh.[378]

In other words, neither the grammar of the *propositio* nor the narrative context support the traditional conclusion that the focus of the message of the speech is the creator of heaven and earth whom the Athenians do not know.

So far then, what the neuter pronoun ὃ refers to is unclear and will need to be clarified in the speech. The narrator has, however, given an indication about the focus of Paul's message earlier, in v. 18: ξένων δαιμονίων δοκεῖ καταγγελεύς εἶναι, ὅτι τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασιν εὐηγγελίζετο. The terminology of καταγγελεύς in v. 18 is precisely picked up by the verb καταγγέλλω in the *propositio* of the speech. As a starting hypothesis then, it is better to propose that the subject of Paul's speech is, as Luke indicates, 'Jesus and the resurrection,' a message which some understood as a proclamation of new or strange divinities, and which Paul introduced as a correction to the ignorant worship of the Athenians (v.29). How this relates to the creator God Paul goes on to speak about in the few next verses is the subject of the next sections.

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[377]The shift from masculine to neuter is also noted by Barrett and Witherington, who follows Polhill. Polhill (1992:372) explains it as Paul's move to emphasize that 'their worship object was a thing, a "what," not a personal God at all.'

[378]So also Gärtner (1955:46-7).

5.1.3. Summary vv. 23-22

By calling them *deisidaimonesterous*, the speech thus begins by pointing to the Athenians' concern to maintain peace with the gods and their fear of divine hostility, and as a proof of it points to the fact that they even built an altar to an unknown god to make sure no divinity is offended. Using the altar both as a sign of their concern and as a symptom of their (partly self-acknowledged) ignorance, Luke's Paul announces that he is proclaiming to them what they are revering ignorantly, i.e. mistakenly.

The mention of the altar to an unknown god thus serves as a symptom both of Athenian extreme concern to maintain peace with the gods and of their ignorance in how to avert divine wrath. There is no reason to believe that there is a relationship between the god of the altar and the god of v. 24. Paul then begins his speech by speaking about the God of heaven and earth.

5.2.   The Creator God's relationship to humanity (17:24–28)

5.2.1.   Vv. 24–25: The impossibility to serve the Creator God along traditional means

24 ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας τὸν κόσμον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ, οὗτος οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς ὑπάρχων κύριος οὐκ ἐν χειροποιήτοις ναοῖς κατοικεῖ 25 οὐδὲ ὑπὸ χειρῶν ἀνθρωπίνων θεραπεύεται προσδεόμενός τινος, αὐτὸς διδοὺς πᾶσι ζωὴν καὶ πνοὴν καὶ τὰ πάντα·

As mentioned above, it is common to interpret verses 24 to 25 as a presentation of the only true God who made the whole world to Athenians who have never heard of him. Yet grammatical structure suggests that this is not the line of the argument. Rather, those verses begin as an assertion about a particular God, namely the one who made the world and everything in it. The first part of the sentence thus does not only describe this God, but also singles him out: the God who made the world and everything in it, *this [particular] one*… does not dwell in man-made temples, nor is he served by human hands: ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας τὸν κόσμον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ, *οὗτος* ...οὐκ ἐν χειροποιήτοις ναοῖς κατοικεῖ οὐδὲ ὑπὸ χειρῶν ἀνθρωπίνων θεραπεύεται [. . .]. Apprehending this nuance has two important consequences.

First, those verses do not read as if Paul was introducing to his audience a new god about whom they have no notion at all. Rather, the speech seems to assume that his audience has encountered the notion of a god creator of the world and all things *or* to take it as self-evident; not that everybody in his audience would have embraced this belief—the Epicureans obviously would not—but the notion is not foreign to them.[379] In any case, the speech does not argue for the existence of such a creator

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[379]So, for example, Plutarch (Brenk 2012:80). On creationism in antiquity, cf. Sedley 2007.

god, but takes it as its starting point: the first sentence of the speech thus begins as an assertion about the creator and lord of the world whose existence is presupposed.

Second, and this has been largely misapprehended in scholarship, those verses do *not* constitute an argument for monotheism, presenting the God who made heaven and earth as the only God.[380] Rather, at this stage, Paul is *distinguishing* this God from others: *this* God—namely the one who made everything—does not live in the houses made for him by humanity, nor can man provide for his needs. In fact, at this stage of the speech, those verses seem to assume the existence of other gods, who, unlike the creator God, *are* in need of housing and have needs.

This reading is confirmed by the particular description of the creator God in those verses—which takes the form of two negated clauses ('he does not live in temples made by human hands' and 'he is not served by human hands'). Indeed, those clauses imply a contrast. In light of the context of the speech (cf. v. 16), there is little doubt that Paul is contrasting the creator God with the idols (or the gods) of the Athenians, which 'live' in temples and are served by human hands. Θεραπεύω is characteristic cultic vocabulary, piety being traditionally described as the 'knowledge of how to serve or worship the gods.'[381] Both of those practices—building a house for the idols of the gods and serving them by bringing them offerings—are common expressions of piety in the Graeco-Roman cult. The speech, however, contrasts the creator God with idols: this is not the way one can relate to the creator God—although this might be the way to relate to other gods!

The assertion about the creator God is supported by two causal participial phrases: this God, *because he is the Lord of heaven and earth*, does not live in temples made by human hands and he is not served by human hands as if needing something *because he himself gives life, breath and everything to all*. Those verses imply a reversal between God and humanity: 'God *the one who made* (ὁ ποιήσας) the world and everything in it, does not dwell in temples *made by human hands* (χειρο**ποιήτοις**), and he is not served—i.e. provided for—by human hands (ὑπὸ χειρῶν ἀνθρωπίνων) as if he needed anything because *he himself* (αὐτός) gives life, breath and all to everybody.' In other words, God *has made* the world in which everything dwells and he does not dwell in what humanity *makes*, and God *is not served* by human hands, but *he himself gives* everything to everybody. Thus, not only can humanity not relate to the creator God in the way it relates to other gods, but this creator God relates to human beings in the very way they try to relate to their gods: the creator God provides for human beings what they try to provide for their gods or the idols of their gods.

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[380]*Contra* what many exegetes assert, Paul's speech is *not* aimed at defending monotheism against polytheism, at least not in the traditional sense implied by interpreters (e.g., Klauck 2000:74). It does defend monotheism, but indirectly. Or rather, monotheism is an entailment of the speech's argument.

[381]Cf. Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Physicists* 1.123 (=Adv. Math. 9.123): ἔστι γὰρ εὐσέβεια ἐπιστήμη θεῶν θεραπείας; Plutarch, *Aem*. 3.2; Diogenes Laertius, 7.119.

Verses 24-25 therefore present the relationship between God and his creation as a reversal of the relationship which humanity has with its other gods or more specifically, its idols. Whereas humanity usually provides temples and services to the idols of its gods, the creator God provides breath, life and everything to humanity and all.

5.2.2. Vv. 26–27: God's arrangement of humanity's conditions to seek him

Verses 26 to 27 then move to describe in more details God's dealings with humanity.

> **Acts 17:26** ἐποίησέν τε ἐξ ἑνὸς πᾶν ἔθνος ἀνθρώπων κατοικεῖν ἐπὶ παντὸς προσώπου τῆς γῆς, ὁρίσας προστεταγμένους καιροὺς καὶ τὰς ὁροθεσίας τῆς κατοικίας αὐτῶν **27** ζητεῖν τὸν θεόν, εἰ ἄρα γε ψηλαφήσειαν αὐτὸν καὶ εὕροιεν, καί γε οὐ μακρὰν ἀπὸ ἑνὸς ἑκάστου ἡμῶν ὑπάρχοντα.

Those two verses, and in particular the two infinitives (κατοικεῖν and ζητεῖν), are often understood to indicate the purpose for which God created humanity: God made mankind so that it might dwell (κατοικεῖν) upon the whole earth and seek (ζητεῖν) him.[382] But, although this is rarely noticed, this interpretation creates a tension with the latter part of verse 27. As many exegetes argue, the optative mood and the connotation of ψηλαφάω, which is often associated with 'fumbling in the darkness,' indicate doubt about the success of humanity's search for God.[383] Those verses are thus commonly translated in this way:

> And he made from one all the people of humanity, so that they might dwell upon the whole face of the earth, having appointed set seasons and limitations to their dwellings, so that they might seek God, if they might indeed touch and find him, and indeed he is not far from each one of us.

This common reading suggests that God created humanity and assigned it the purpose to dwell upon the earth and seek him, while at the same time expressing uncertainty about the success of humanity's search, even though God is not far from mankind. It thus intimates that God created humanity for two specific purposes—to fill the earth and to seek him—while also expressing serious doubts about the success of this search and thus the fulfilment of God's purposes. While not impossible, this interpretation has the consequence of depicting God more like a *Zauberlehrling* whose creative purposes are likely to fail, than like the provident creator which the speech otherwise seems to imply.

A better reading is possible, however, if the two infinitives are interpreted as indicating the purpose of the entire clauses which precede them. Thus, κατοικεῖν ἐπὶ παντὸς προσώπου τῆς γῆς does

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[382]E.g., Barrett 2004:842; Haenchen 1971:523.

[383]Barrett 2004:844; Conzlemann 1987:144; Jipp 2012:582.

not spell out the purpose for which God created humanity (ἐποίησεν), but the purpose which God sought to accomplish by creating, out of a single one, each race of men (ἐποίησέν τε ἐξ ἑνὸς πᾶν ἔθνος ἀνθρώπων). The first part of verse 26 thus does not affirm God's creation of mankind *simpliciter*, but how God creates *all* people of mankind (πᾶν ἔθνος ἀνθρώπων) through *one*, so that it might dwell upon *all* the face earth (ἐπὶ παντὸς προσώπου τῆς γῆς). This exegesis is supported by the repetition of πᾶς: it was God's purpose to fill the *whole* face of the earth with mankind, and thus he created *all* people from one. Another advantage of this reading is that this way v. 26 does not repeat the content of v. 25—i.e. God gives life to all—by asserting that God created humanity, but it moves on to give additional and different information (cf. τε): and from one human being (ἐποίησέν τε ἐξ ἑνὸς), God created all races of mankind, so that they would dwell upon all the earth.[384]

Likewise, ζητεῖν τὸν θεόν does not depend upon ἐποίησεν only, but either describes the purpose of ὁρίσας προστεταγμένους καιροὺς καὶ τὰς ὁροθεσίας τῆς κατοικίας αὐτῶν, or of the whole of v. 26. ὁρίσας προστεταγμένους καιροὺς καὶ τὰς ὁροθεσίας τῆς κατοικίας αὐτῶν is often interpreted as a reference to the expression of divine providence in nature which enables or pushes humanity to search for God. Support for this reading is found in the fact that the idea that nature bears witness to God is attested both in Greek philosophical and Jewish literature, and seems to be found also in Acts 14:17 where God's provision of rains and fruitful seasons is presented as God's witness to himself.[385] It should be noted, however, that although this interpretation makes good sense of προστεταγμένους καιρούς which can refer to the set seasons which witness to God's providence, it is, however, less successful in explaining τὰς ὁροθεσίας τῆς κατοικίας αὐτῶν. Dibelius had argued that this phrase refers to the zones of the earth which are fit for human habitation according to some philosophers.[386] But Eltester contested this interpretation by pointing out that only two zones out of five were thought to be inhabitable, something which conflicts with the speech's claim that God made humanity to dwell upon *all* the earth. Eltester thus suggested that ὁροθεσίας τῆς κατοικίας αὐτῶν is a reference to the biblical description of God's shielding the habitations of human beings against the chaos-threatening sea.[387] But this explanation is not more convincing if we hypothesise that Luke is concerned about narrative realism because the Athenians of the narrative world of Acts would hardly have understood such a biblical allusion.

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[384]The expression ἐξ ἑνὸς is often interpreted as pointing to the unity of mankind (e.g., Pervo 2008:435). But this nuance does not fit the argument. Rather, as suggested above, it explains the process of creation and the means by which God filled the earth with human beings.

[385]Acts 14:17: καίτοι οὐκ ἀμάρτυρον αὐτὸν ἀφῆκεν ἀγαθουργῶν, οὐρανόθεν ὑμῖν ὑετοὺς διδοὺς καὶ καιροὺς καρποφόρους, ἐμπιπλῶν τροφῆς καὶ εὐφροσύνης τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν.

[386]Dibelius 1939:30-31.

[387]Eltester 1957:100-102.

In this light, it might be better to take ὁρίσας προστεταγμένους καιροὺς καὶ τὰς ὁροθεσίας τῆς κατοικίας αὐτῶν as a modifier of the preceding clause commenting on the way God made it possible for humanity to dwell upon the whole earth. προστεταγμένους καιρούς is thus best translated as 'determined seasons' and refers to God's provision of harvest and food at fixed (i.e. regular) times during the year to enable humanity to plan its survival. More tentatively, τὰς ὁροθεσίας τῆς κατοικίας αὐτῶν—i.e. the 'boundaries to their dwelling place'—is likely a reference to God's provision of different lands or regions to different people to ensure each one has a place to live and flourish (i.e. multiply and grow). This reading also coheres well with vv. 24–25, by building upon the idea that God cannot be provided a house and food by humanity and reversing it by describing God's provision of food (through set seasons) and dwelling places (through boundaries) for mankind. The participial phrase thus points to the way God arranged the conditions of life for all people, by setting fixed seasons and boundaries to their dwelling places, *making it possible for them to dwell on all the earth*. God thus organizes the indwelling of all the earth by humanity by multiplying mankind through the gift of fruitfulness and life giving 'out of one' (ἐξ ἑνὸς) and gives them seasons and dwelling places to sustain life and flourish. Κατοικεῖν thus does not so much describe the purpose which God assigns to humanity, but what *he* enables and arranges through a creative action ἐξ ἑνὸς and the arrangement of 'conditions of life' as is suggested by ὁρίσας προστεταγμένους καιροὺς καὶ τὰς ὁροθεσίας τῆς κατοικίας αὐτῶν.[388]

The second infinitive clause (ζητεῖν τὸν θεόν) in verse 27 then describes the purpose or result of the whole sentence in v. 26: God from one created all peoples so that they would dwell upon the whole face of the earth, having appointed set seasons and boundaries to their dwelling place, so that they might seek God, if they might feel for him and find him.[389]

According to this reading, then, those verses do not describe the purposes which God assigns to humanity, but how God arranges and enables humanity to fulfil his own purpose, which is to fill all the earth with mankind, and thus, that mankind would seek, touch and find him.

There remains a final intriguing element in those verses, namely the second part of verse 27. Indeed, although this is rarely commented upon by exegetes, the verb ψηλαφάω—to feel—suggests a

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[388]Κατοικεῖν thus has the nuance either of purpose or of result/consequence, or, possibly, both: God multiplied mankind with the aim and result that they might dwell upon the all earth.

[389]According to Turner (1963:127), εἰ *cum* optative in Acts 17:27 expresses not so much a real condition as a final clause: 'The other instances of εἰ c. opt. are not so much real conditions as final clauses (Ac 17:27 27:12), and there are parenthetical phrases introduced by εἰ = *if possible* or *as it were*: εἰ δυνατὸν εἴη (vl. ἦν), εἰ δύναιντο (Ac 20:16 27:39) and εἰ τύχοι (1 Co 14:10 15:37). Other clauses introduced by εἰ and dependent on a verb like ζητεῖν are virtually indirect questions, a class. survival: Ac 17:11, 25:20.'

physical touch, rather than a metaphorical attempt to 'grasp' God intellectually.[390] As commonly noted, the verb is often used to express the 'feeling around' of people fumbling in the dark. In the LXX the verb is used 10 times out of 15 to describe people suffering from blindness and thus feeling their way around in obscurity.[391] Similarly the verb frequently occurs to describe the groping in the dark in Greek literature (e.g. Homer, *Od.* 9.416; Plato, *Phaed.* 99b). The idea that humanity can 'touch' or even 'feel' God in such a physical way is, to my knowledge, unheard of in Jewish thought, although recent scholarship has drawn attention to the corporeality of the God of the Old Testament presupposed and even affirmed in some texts.[392] For example, the fact that some texts speak of the possibility of 'seeing' God physically, or of God being localized in particular places, implies some sort of corporeality. Some recent scholarship on the *imago dei* in the Old Testament also suggests that the Jewish God is sometimes described as manifesting himself very directly and in a physically located and perceptible way through human beings. For example, Stephen Herring has argued that Exodus 32-34 is crafted to show that Moses is the true image of God reflecting divine glory in contrast to the golden calf fashioned by the Israelites.[393]

Better known to the Athenians, however, would have been the fact that idols in Graeco-Roman religion were thought to provide a means of approaching and even 'touching' the gods. In fact, some Hellenistic Greek authors used this argument to defend the use of idols in the traditional cult. As they argued, the materiality of idols enabled the worshippers to 'touch' and 'feel' the gods and to connect to the divine.[394] For example, in his discourse defending the creation of statues of the gods, Dio Chrysostom, an intellectual influenced by Stoicism, points to the necessity of a material and touchable representation of the gods to enable the worshippers to connect to them and worship them.

> For no one would maintain that it would have been better that neither statue (ἵδρυμα) nor
> picture (εἰκόνα) of the gods be exhibited among men, because we should look only at the

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[390]The physical nuance implied in this verb is rightly emphasized by Norden 1913 (cf. Johnson 1992:316). When it is used metaphorically, ψηλαφάω means 'to test, to examine.' Cf. LSJ s.v.

[391]The verb is used three times to refer to Isaac 'feeling' Jacob (Gen 27:12, 21, 22), twice as part of the curse which will fall upon the Israelites if they disobey the voice of the Lord—i.e. they will grope at noonday as the blind grope in darkness (Dt 28:29 2x), once when Samson asks to feel the pillar on which the house rests (Jdg 16:26), four times to describe the judgment of God who makes people grope at noonday as in the night (Job 5:14; 12:25; cf. Isa 59:10 2x). Also noteworthy in light of the context of idolatry in which the speech is pronounced, is the fact that the verb is used several times in the LXX to describe idols who have hands but cannot 'feel' (LXX Ps 113:15; 134:17).

[392]See Markschies 2016.

[393]Herring 2013.

[394]See Stewart 2003. On the defense of the use of idols for worship by Greek intellectuals, see Clerc 1915, especially part 3.

heavens. For on the one hand, the sensible person worships all these objects, believing them to be blessed gods as he sees them from afar. But on the other hand, on the account of their inclination towards the gods (τὴν πρὸς τὸ δαιμόνιον γνώμην), all men have a strong yearning (ἔρως) to honour and worship the divine (τιμᾶν καὶ θεραπευειν τὸ θεῖον) from close at hand, approaching it and touching (ἁπτομένους) it with persuasion (μετὰ πειθοῦς), by offering it sacrifices and crowning them with garlands. For certainly as infant children when torn away from their father or mother have a terrible longing and desire, and stretch out their hands to their absent parents often when they are dreaming, so also do men towards the gods, rightly loving them on account of their beneficence (εὐεργεσίαν) and their kinship (συγγένειαν), being eager in any way to be with them and to interact with them (ὁμιλεῖν). (Dio Chrysostom, 12.60–61 [MC])

As Chrysostom highlights, physical or anthropomorphic representations of the gods aim to facilitate the connection with, and worship of, those divinities.

What exactly is meant in v. 27 by God's desire that humanity might 'touch' him is difficult to ascertain. Our exegesis of verses 26 and 27, however, suggests that God's multiplication of mankind on all the earth and his provision for their life and flourishing aimed to enable them to seek him and even 'get a feel' for him. One might wonder at this stage whether those verses suggest that God intended humanity itself to be a witness to him and the means by which humanity gets to know, find and possibly touch him, just like idols enabled to get a feel for the gods in the ancient world. This would explain the importance of populating the whole earth with mankind in God's provident arrangement. The biblical idea of God creating humanity in his image and ordering it to fill the earth, and the belief shared by some Greek philosophers that humanity contains something divine (Platonists and Stoics) and is meant to be godlike and like a statue of the gods (Stoics) certainly add plausibility to this interpretation in the context at hand.[395]

Verse 27, however, describes the human search for God as a feeling around for him in the darkness, and the optative mood casts doubt upon the success of this search. This fits well with the description of the Athenians as ignorant and living in ignorance. In the context of an anti-idol polemic, and for a reader well-versed in the LXX, this description of humanity is also strangely reminiscent of the way the OT describes idols, where the verb ψηλαφάω is used several times to refer to idols who have hands but cannot 'feel' (LXX Ps 113:15; 134:17).

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[395]On the Stoic comparison of humanity with a statue of the gods, see 5.3.

5.2.3. V. 28: The witness of human life

The reason for the affirmation of God's nearness is then given in verse 28 (γὰρ).[396]

ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν, ὡς καί τινες τῶν καθ᾽ ὑμᾶς ποιητῶν εἰρήκασιν· τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἐσμέν.

It is often commented that ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν (28a) sounds Stoic or Platonic.[397] But so far, no exact parallel has been found in ancient Stoic or Platonic literature. Because the clause sounds pantheistic and poetic, however, many exegetes suggest that Luke took the clause from somewhere and did not create it himself.[398] Whatever its origin, there is no clue in the immediate context provided by the speech nor in the broader narrative of Acts that this formulation should be interpreted along pantheistic lines. Rather, as most exegetes note, in the speech ἐν αὐτῷ means 'by him' or 'through him.'[399] The clause thus underscores that human life, movement and existence comes from, and is sustained by, God. It is worth noticing that this idea is not foreign to Luke and that he expresses similar thoughts in his gospel in the context of a discussion about the resurrection. In Lk 20:38, Jesus concludes his answer to the Sadducee's question with the affirmation:

θεὸς δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν νεκρῶν ἀλλὰ ζώντων, πάντες γὰρ αὐτῷ ζῶσιν.
Now he is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live by him (or to him).

What is regularly overlooked, however, is that within the argument of the speech of Acts 17, ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν is not simply an affirmation of humanity's dependence upon God, but functions as a proof of God's nearness affirmed in v. 27: 'and indeed he is not far from each one of us; *for* (γὰρ) by him we live, and move and are.' The life and movement of human beings are thus a testimony to God's nearness, because it is through God that humanity lives and moves.

In this light, it is worth reconsidering the possibility that v. 28a is a quotation from Epimenides. This hypothesis, which was accepted by some influential scholars in the first part of the 20th century before the publications of articles by Pohlenz and Hommel in the late 1940s and 1950s, has recently

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[396]As Barrett (2004:846) notes, another possibility is that v.28 explains v. 27 as a whole.

[397]Pohlenz 1949; Hommel 1955 and 1957; Conzelmann 1987:144; Haenchen 1971:524, n.3; Jervell 1998:449; Marguerat 2015:161; Jipp 2012:583.

[398]Pohlenz 1949:104; Haenchen 1971:524 (n.3); Barrett (2004:847) and Pervo (2008:438) consider it as possible and probable respectively. See however Gärtner (1955:195) who attributes it to Paul or Luke.

[399]Jervell, 1998:449; Barrett 2004:847; Marguerat 2015:161. Even exegetes who argue that the clause is of Stoic or Platonic origin often comment that in the speech the clause is not used pantheistically.

been defended anew by Rothschild.[400] The strongest argument against an Epimenidean authorship is that none of the writings which have come down to us directly from the pen of the church fathers identifies v. 28a as a quotation. In particular, neither Clement of Alexandria (150–215 CE), nor Theodore of Mopsuestia (350–428 CE) or John Chrysostom (347–407 CE) mention v.28a among their examples of New Testament authors quoting Greek philosophers or poets, or in their discussion of Acts 17:28, even though they all note that Paul cites the Greeks in Acts 17:28b and Tit 1:12.[401] Furthermore, Clement and Chrysostom both identify Tit 1:12 as a verse from Epimenides.[402] In the early 20th century, however, J. Rendel Harris discovered a fragment attributing 28a to an encomium pronounced by the legendary son of Zeus, Minos, in a Nestorian commentary entitled *Gannat Busame* or 'Garden of Delights' containing excerpts from the Syrian Fathers. The extract is translated as follows:

> 'In Him we live and move and have our being.' The Cretans used to say of Zeus, that he was a prince and was ripped up by a wild boar, and he was buried: and lo! his grave is with us. Accordingly Minos, the son of Zeus, made over him a panegyric and in it he said: 'A grave have fashioned for thee, O holy and high One, the lying Cretans, who are all the time liars, evil beasts, idle bellies; but thou diest not, for to eternity thou livest, and standest; for in thee we live and move and have our being.'[403]

Harris ascribes the excerpt to Theodore of Mopsuestia, an attribution which would situate it in the 4–5th centuries.[404] According to the fragment, both the quote found in Tit 1:12 and usually attributed to Epimenides—'the lying Cretans, who are all the time liars, evil beats, idle bellies'—and the clause found in Ac 17:28a—'for in him we live and move and have our being'—appear in a same text,

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[400]Rothschild 2014. An Epimenidean background was accepted by none others than Norden (1913:277 n.1), Lake (1933:250) and Dibelius (1939:49-50). Yet after the publication of Pohlenz 1949 and Hommel 1955 and 1957, many exegetes do not even mention the hypothesis (Conzelmann 1987:144-145) or reject it (Haenchen 1971:524 n. 3; Barrett 2004:847). Marguerat (2015:161) mentions it in a footnote and writes: 'La thèse d'une citation en 28a d'un hymne à Zeus d'Epiménide de Crète (VIe siècle av. J.-C.) a été abandonnée.' Fitzmyer (1998:610) considers it 'highly unlikely.' Johnson (1992:316) and Jipp (2012:853 n.64), however, list it as a possibility.

[401]For a detailed discussion, cf. Rothschild 2014:8-16.

[402]Tit 1:12: εἶπέν τις ἐξ αὐτῶν ἴδιος αὐτῶν προφήτης· Κρῆτες ἀεὶ ψεῦσται, κακὰ θηρία, γαστέρες ἀργαί. Epimenides was originally from Crete. He is mentioned by Diogenes Laertius 1.112 as one of the seven sages. Clement associates Tit 1:12 to Epimenides in *Stromata* 1.59.

[403]Harris 1906a:310.

[404]Harris 1906a:310: 'It certainly is a translation from the Greek and follows immediately on an extract from Theodore.' Cf. Lake 1933:249.

namely a panegyric to Zeus pronounced by his son Minos. As Harris comments, the reference to Minos as the author of the panegyric is reconcilable with an Epimenidean authorship since, as we know from Diogenes Laertius (1.112), Epimenides was the author of a poem in 1000 verses on Minos and Rhadamanthus.[405] Hence his suggestion that Acts 17:28a stems originally from a poem from Epimenides on Minos, which contains a reference to the famous Cretan lie that Zeus has died.

A confirmation of this original context for 17:28a was provided by the publication of Isho'dad's ninth-century Syriac commentary by 'the Westminster sisters' in 1913. The passage reads as follows:

> This, 'in him we live and move and have our being'; and this, 'As certain of your own sages have said, We are his offspring.' Paul takes both of these from certain heathen poets. Now about this, 'In him we live,' etc.; because the Cretans said as truth about Zeus, that he was a Lord; he was lacerated by a wild boar and buried; and behold! His grave is known amongst us; so therefore Minos, son of Zeus, made laudatory speech on behalf of his father; and he said in it, '*The Cretans carve a tomb for thee, O holy and high! Liars, evil beasts, and slow bellies! For thou art not dead for ever; thou art alive and risen; for in thee we live and are moved, and have our being,*' so therefore the blessed Paul took this sentence from Minos.[406]

Isho'dad frequently relies on Theodore of Mopsuestia in his commentary and it is possible that the church father is his source here as well.[407] Furthermore, the *Gannat Busame* relies on Isho'dad's Nestorian commentary at several places, and the latter might well have been its source for this passage as well.[408] In any case, according to Isho'dad, the quotation in Acts 17:28a comes from the laudatory speech attributed to Minos in answer to the well-known Cretan lie that Zeus is dead and buried in Crete.[409] The story of the Cretan lie was well-known in Antiquity, and Callimachus attests to its association with the phrase 'Cretans are always liars' (*Hymn to Zeus* 8).

This evidence led scholars such as Norden (1913), Lake (1933) and Dibelius (1939) to endorse an Epimenidean background for 28a. In the late 40s and in the 50s, however, Pohlenz and Hommel argued against this background as part of their contention that the speech—and in particular v. 28a—

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[405]Harris 1906a:311.

[406]ET Margaret Dunlop Gibson as cited in Lake (1933:249), my emphasis. Isho'dad was a Nestorian whose work was discovered by the twins Agnes Smith Lewis and Margaret Dunlop Gibson (i.e. 'the Westminster sisters') on a trip to Saint Catherine's Monastery and was published by them in 1913. Original and context in Gibson 1913.

[407]Lake 1933:249.

[408]Harris 1911: xviii.

[409]In fact, it apparently comes from the same text from which Tit 1:12 is quoted.

rather reflect Stoic or Platonic influence.[410] Emphasizing that early exegetes such as Clement or Jerome do not recognize a quote from Epimenides in Acts 17:8a, Pohlenz argued that Isho'dad had interpreted the plural of 'ποιητῶν' in v. 28 literally and, based on Callimachus' verses, invented the attribution to Minos (perhaps based on an apocryphal work), and added the line found in Ac 17:28a in the passage. He writes:

> Ab seine Kallimachosparaphrase schließt nun 'Minos' bei Ischodad und ähnlich im Gannat Busamé unmittelbar die Worte an: '*for in thee we live and are moved and have our being*' und Ischodad vermerkt dazu '*so therefore the blessed Paul took this sentence from Minos*.[411]

Pohlenz disputes the attribution of this verse to a poem of Epimenides on the ground that such an argument – i.e. that Zeus cannot be dead because human beings are alive – and such a pantheistic view are unlikely to have occurred in a poet of the early 5th century BCE, adding that such an explicit association of the pagan Zeus with eternal life and the origin of all life would hardly have been a wise move on Paul's part.[412] For Pohlenz then, the verse 'in him we live and move and are' stems from Posidonius.[413]

Pohlenz's argument, however, is unconvincing. First, his question concerning the judiciousness of Paul's association of life with Zeus in a mission speech is problematic because, as is widely recognized, Ac 17:28b is a quotation from Aratus' *Phaenomena* 5 about Zeus being the father of humanity, and thus also associates the Christian God with Zeus as the originator and provider of humanity's life. Likewise, the suggestion that a 5th-century poet is unlikely to have such a pantheistic worldview is not strong evidence, since the phrase does not have to be interpreted pantheistically.

Above all, however, Pohlenz fails to provide a convincing explanation for the addition of 28a to the story of the Cretan lie by Isho'dad (and by the author of the *Gannat Busame* if he does not rely on Isho'dad), or another Christian copyist before him. As he himself notes, several church fathers (such as Jerome) had already questioned the wisdom of 'Paul' quoting Κρῆτες ἀεὶ ψεῦσται in Tit 1:12

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[410]Pohlenz's discussion of Isho'dad on Acts 17:28a occurs in a 4 pages-appendix to his article "Paulus und die Stoa," where he discusses the Stoic background of Romans 1 and Acts 17.

[411]Pohlenz 1949:103 (emphasis his).

[412]Pohlenz 1949:103: 'Ihm [Harris] sind dann die anderen gefolgt, ohne sich zu fragen, ob denn ein alter Dichter, der gegen die Behauptung vom Tode des Zeus protestieren wollte, Anlaß dazu hatte, unmittelbar die Begründung hinzufügen, daß wir Menschen in Zeus unser Leben haben, oder ob eine derartige Formulierung pantheistischen Weltgefühl für einen Mann aus dem Anfang des V. Jhs überhaupt denkbar ist, ob endlich Paulus wirklich klug daran getan hätte, in einer Missionspredigt für die Heiden einen Vers beifällig zu zitieren, der ausdrücklich für Zeus als Gott der Volkreligion Ewigkeit und den Charakter als Urgrund alles Lebens in Anspruch nahm.'

[413]Pohlenz 1949:104.

because it seems to justify belief in Zeus.[414] For Christian commentators to create a story or add this line in the context of a pagan mythological story about Minos and Zeus only to fit the plural of ποιητῶν, then, would certainly have been a daring move. And as mentioned earlier, several earlier commentators had only identified one quotation of Greek poets in 17:28 without showing concern for the plural form. In any case Isho'dad himself does not express an apologetic concern in his commentary and no particular attention is paid to the plural ποιητῶν.[415] As often in his commentary on Acts, he only explains this background but does not exploit it to make a particular point in his commentary. The arguments suggested by Pohlenz against an Epimenidean proposal are thus not conclusive.

In addition, a good case can in fact be made for the use of such a quote in Luke's passage. Scholars who have accepted an Epimenidean background to 28a have usually suggested that Luke's use of it could be explained by the fact that, as we know from Diogenes Laertius (*Epim* 3) Epimenides had been called from Crete to Athens to counsel the Athenians on how to stop a pestilence caused by an offended deity.[416] To solve the issue, Epimenides let loose a number of black and white sheep and ordered to build an altar and offer a sacrifice τῷ προσήκοντι θεῷ wherever they lay down. According to Diogenes, this is why there are altars without names (βωμοὺς ἀνωνύμους) in Athens. The mention of a verse by Epimenides thus fitted Paul's discussion of an 'altar to an unknown god' in Athens.[417] Our discussion about *deisidaimonia* as the concern to avert divine hostility would certainly add to the plausibility of this hypothesis.

There is, however, a much stronger argument for linking 28a with the Epimenidean background which has remained surprisingly unnoticed thus far in scholarship. The key lies not so much in linking those verses to Epimenides himself, but to the *context* in which the verse appears according to the *Gannat Busame* and Isho'dad, namely the Cretan lie. As they both suggest, the quote is part of a denunciation of the lie that Zeus is dead, asserting that the highest god is alive and risen and that this is proved by the fact that 'in him we live and move and have our being.' The text thus argues that the life of humanity attests that Zeus must be alive since he is the provider of human life. This fits remarkably well with the context of the quote in the speech in Acts 17. Indeed, the assertion 'in him we live and move and are' (28a) is introduced as an explanation or a proof (γάρ) for divine proximity (καί γε οὐ μακρὰν ἀπὸ ἑνὸς ἑκάστου ἡμῶν ὑπάρχοντα): the fact that humanity's life, moving and being comes from God is thus a witness to God's proximity. If the original context of ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ

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[414]Pohlenz 1949:103.

[415]See Gibson 1913:29.

[416]On the ancient traditions about Epimenides, including in Plato and Aristotle, cf. Lake 1933.

[417]Harris 1906a:317; Lake 1933:251. Rothschild 2014 argues that Luke depicts Paul as a 'new' Epimenides not only in the speech of Acts 17, but throughout the entire narrative of Acts. See my brief review in *JRS* 42 (2016): 43-44.

ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν is as suggested by the *Gannat Busame* and Isho'dad then, this would be a very appropriate use of the quotation in a similar context. The story of the Cretan lie about Zeus was very well-known in antiquity, and many authors mention it. Therefore, although Callimachus does not mention Minos' panegyric in his poem, it is not at all unthinkable that another tradition reports the story as suggested by the Syrian fathers, and that Luke used a verse from this particular tradition.[418] That would explain the poetic formulation of 28a.

Such a background for the quote thus confirms that the point of 28a is that humanity's life is ensured by God and that this attests to his nearness. The second part of verse 28 makes a closely connected point. τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἐσμέν has been identified to be from the *Phenomena* of Aratus, a poet influenced by Stoicism. A very similar clause also appears in the Stoic Cleanthes's *Hymn to Zeus*: ἐκ σοῦ γὰρ γένος εἴσι (*SVF* 1.537), and it is possible that several sources are in mind, but the exact quotation comes from Aratus.[419] The Stoics believed in the kinship of humanity with the divine, a kinship rooted in the fact that both shared in the *logos*—the divine principle. Many exegetes have thus argued that at this point the speech embraces or at least seeks a rapprochement with Stoicism. The kinship envisioned by the Stoics, however, is closely related to pantheism since it is a consequence of the divine principle permeating all things and especially rational creatures. It is a kinship which consists in a rational principle (i.e. the *logos*). The quote thus seems to introduce an idea otherwise foreign to the kerygma in Luke.[420]

In Aratus' poem, however, the 'kinship' of humanity with Zeus does not refer to the *logos* it shares with the highest god, but to humanity's dependence upon Zeus for its life. The text reads:

> From Zeus let us begin; him do we mortals never leave unnamed; full of Zeus are all the streets and all the market-places of men; full is the sea and the havens thereof; *always we all have need of Zeus. For we are also his offspring* [τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος εἰμέν]*; and he in his kindness unto men giveth favourable signs and wakeneth the people to work, reminding them of livelihood.* He tells what time the soil is best for the labour of the ox and for the mattock, and what time the seasons are favourable both for the planting of trees and for casting all manner of seeds. For himself it was who set the signs in heaven, and marked out the constellations, and for the year devised what stars chiefly should give to men right signs of the seasons, to the end that all things might grow unfailingly. Wherefore him do men ever worship first and last. Hail, O Father, mighty marvel, mighty blessing unto men. Hail to thee and to the Elder Race! Hail, ye

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[418]For other references to the Cretan lie in antiquity, see Cook 1914 and Rothschild 2014.

[419]Barrett 2004:848. The full context of the quote in Cleanthes runs: 'For it is right for all mortals to address you:/ for we have our origin in you, bearing a likeness to God,/ we, alone of all that live and move as mortal creatures on earth.' (Thom 2005:52).

[420]Famously, this is also one of the points which make the speech emphatically 'unpauline.'

Muses, right kindly, every one! But for me, too, in answer to my prayer direct all my lay, even as is meet, to tell the stars. (Aratus, *Phaen*.1-18 [LCL] *my emphasis*)

Despite the pantheistic flavour of the beginning of the poem, τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος εἰμέν is used as a metaphor to compare the relationship of dependence of humanity towards Zeus to that of children's dependence upon their father. Douglas Kidd comments:

> A[ratus] begins with a short proem, which owes its form to the traditions of Hesiodic epic and its content to contemporary themes of Stoicism. The main section is a hymn to Zeus, the divinity that pervades the whole cosmos and is the source of all forms of life. He is in this sense our father, and acts like a father in helping men to cope with the struggle for existence, especially in agriculture. To this end he has established the constellations in the sky to serve as a guide to the seasons throughout the year, and this is why Zeus is so widely worshipped (1–14).[421]

> Aratus now casts his Stoicism in the form of the old mythologies: since we derive our life from Zeus, we may be described as his children. This is an important step in the argument of the proem, because it leads on to the concept of Zeus as also a father, and therefore a kindly influence: καὶ brings out this new point.[422]

γένος is thus used metaphorically with the meaning of 'offspring' and specifically refers to the fact that the origin of human life lies in God and that it is God who continually provides for the needs of its life, just like a father does for his children. The Stoics often used the metaphor of father to argue precisely this point.[423] This metaphorical meaning fits well with the argument of the speech in 17:28, which has just affirmed that humanity depends upon God to live, move and exist. The poem of Aratus was well-known and popular in antiquity, as its translations into Latin and Arabic show, and it is thus plausible that Luke and his readers would have known the original context of the quote.[424] As this context shows, however, the metaphor does not emphasize human kinship with god through the *logos*, but serves to highlight the dependence of human life upon God, and above all the divine goodness and

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[421]Kidd 1997:161.

[422]Kidd 1997:166. According to Kidd, Aratus also alludes to Epimenides' story about the Cretan lie in l.30.

[423]See Algra 2007b:46-47.

[424]The translation into Latin was made by Cicero. That the poem was also known in Jewish circles is demonstrated by the quote from the poem which is found in Aristobulus (2nd c. BC).

providence which ensures humanity's continuing life and the reason for human worship and praise of the highest god.

By quoting from two Greek poets, verse 28 thus affirms that human life and the continuing animation (cf. κινούμεθα) of humanity is a constant witness and testimony to God's proximity (v. 27b).[425] Within the argument of the speech, then, and especially as the climax of verses 26-28, verse 28 does not so much aim to argue for humanity's complete dependence upon God as commonly presumed by exegetes, but rather, *assuming it* (note that this common knowledge—if not necessarily acceptance—is demonstrated by the Greek's own poets here!), makes the point that humanity's very life and animation demonstrates the nearness of God and is a witness to him.[426]

5.2.4. Summary vv. 24-28

After pointing to the Athenians' concern about divine hostility and their ignorance as illustrated by their setting up an altar to an unknown god, the speech announces that it proclaims what they are revering ignorantly (vv. 22-23).

It then begins by turning to the creator God, underscoring that this one [god] cannot be served along traditional means – namely by providing him with a temple or with services – because he *himself* (cf. αὐτός) is the Lord of heaven and earth, and in fact provides all with breath, life and everything. The speech thus highlights that the relationship between the creator God and humanity functions as a reversal of traditional worship: God provides for humanity what humanity provides its gods through idols.

Verses 26-27 then further explains how God filled the earth with humanity, multiplying it 'from a single one' and giving them dwelling places and seasons to live and multiply. This, God did so that humanity might seek him, if it could possibly touch and find him. The reason for this is that God is not far from each one of us, since he provides humanity's life and move, and continually sustains their life like a father (v.28).

Those verses thus continue to depict God's relationship to humanity as one of divine provision – with dwelling places and seasons (food) – for human life, thereby continuing to describe his relationship to man as a reversal of the traditional man-divine (or man-idol) relationship in traditional Graeco-Roman religion. In addition, it explains that God filled the earth with humanity and ensured

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[425]This reading is corroborated by Acts 14:17 which also emphasizes divine provision of rain and food—most likely a reference to Gods' life provision. In Acts 14, this is used as an expression of God's benefaction, which witnesses to him: καίτοι οὐκ ἀμάρτυρον αὐτὸν ἀφῆκεν ἀγαθουργῶν, οὐρανόθεν ὑμῖν ὑετοὺς διδοὺς καὶ καιροὺς καρποφόρους, ἐμπιπλῶν τροφῆς καὶ εὐφροσύνης τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν.

[426]The function of v.28 in the argument is often misunderstood and exegetes overlook its connection with v. 27. So for example, Jipp (2012:584) writes: 'Paul, thus, invokes the Athenians' poets, with a Stoic emphasis, to support his claim that humanity's desire for God has been implanted within them.'

its life so that it might seek, and possibly 'feel' and find God. Indeed, the life and movement of each human being is a witness to God's nearness. Again then, by depicting God as arranging humanity on all the earth to be a witness to him, the speech seems to further assign to humanity a role similar to that which idols played in ancient religion: representing the god in a particular place. Furthermore, one of the purposes of divine representations in the ancient world was precisely so that human beings could 'touch' and connect to the gods. The idea of humanity playing the role of an 'image of the divine' was familiar both to the Jews through the concept of the *imago dei* found in the biblical creation account, and to the Greeks, through Stoic philosophers, who precisely emphasized that it is the role of humanity to be god's worthy image.

The speech thus far has therefore created a narrative which suggests that the creator God's relationship to humanity is similar to, but a reversal of, that which human beings have towards their gods through idols. At the same time, the speech describes humanity's search for God as a feeling for him in the darkness and casts doubt upon the success of this search, thereby suggesting a problem with humanity's witness to God. And indeed, intriguingly, the word used to describe humanity's feel for God - ψηλαφάω – is the same which is the LXX uses to describe idols which have hands but cannot 'feel.'

5.3.   False divine representations (17:29)

5.3.1.   Preliminary remarks on the logic of verse 29

V. 29 is marked by the appearance of a neuter substantive (τὸ θεῖον) which probably harks back to the neuter pronouns used to present the subject of the speech in v.23, and thereby signals that the speech reaches its conclusion.

> γένος οὖν ὑπάρχοντες τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ὀφείλομεν νομίζειν χρυσῷ ἢ ἀργύρῳ ἢ λίθῳ, χαράγματι τέχνης καὶ ἐνθυμήσεως ἀνθρώπου, τὸ θεῖον εἶναι ὅμοιον.

By and large, exegetes have interpreted v. 29 as a denunciation of Athenian idolatry. The verse is considered to be a criticism along the lines of Jewish anti-idol polemics, possibly also echoing some philosophical denunciations of divine representation.[427] As several scholars note, however, the logic of verse 29, which is presented as a consequence of v. 28 (cf. οὖν), is not easy to apprehend. Pervo,

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[427]E.g., Haenchen 1971:525; Marguerat 2015: 161-162.

for example, points out that the reader has the feeling that one step is missing in the argument from the affirmation of humanity's kinship with God to the rejection of images.[428]

Exegetes who associate this kinship with rationality have suggested that v. 29 is an appeal to think about God rationally, and thus exclude the association of the divine with material objects.[429] More generally, the move is understood to be an argument from the lesser to the greater: since humanity was made by God, it should not worship something made by man.[430] For example, Barrett writes:

> The argument runs back from men to God: since we are the thinking and feeling persons that we are, we ought not to suppose that the divine being (τὸ θεῖον, rather than τὸν θεόν; on this see below) is made of metal, even precious metal, or of wood. Luke might have balanced θεῖον with ἀνθρώπειον. If human nature is what we know it to be, and if we who have human nature are God's children, the divine nature will be of no lower order. We deny our own proper being if we identify our progenitor with material objects.[431]

For Barrett, the fact that human beings are thinking and feeling and that they are God's children implies that God cannot be of a lower order than human beings, and thus cannot be made of material.

As shall be argued, however, those common explanations are not fully satisfactory. Two clarifications are helpful here to highlight the logic of this verse.

First, it is noteworthy that what is denounced here is not the *identification* of idols with the divine or gods. In other words, verse 29 does not argue, 'we should not think that man-made objects are gods.'[432] The problem denounced is not the direct equation of idols—man-made objects—with gods. The speech is thus not following the move made by many Jewish anti-idol polemics denouncing those who call man-made objects—which typically cannot see, hear or touch—'gods' (e.g., Dt 4:28;

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[428]Pervo 2008:439: 'Just as the creedal affirmation of God as creator discredited the notion of temples, so God's paternity is the ground for rejecting images (v.29). This enthymeme, as it were, involves a leap. The speaker does not, for example, state that humans were created in the image of God.' See also Jervell (1998:450): 'Die Schlussfolgerung ist überraschend und nicht ganz einleuchtend [. . .].' And Conzelmann 1987:145: 'At first the logic is not clear.'

[429]Johnson 1992:317: 'The implicit appeal is to think of "the divine" (*to theion* used only here in the NT) in terms appropriate to rational creatures.'

[430]Haenchen 1971:525: 'What originates in our artistic ability and consideration, and therefore stands under us, cannot portray the divine, which stands over us!'

[431]Barrett 2004:849.

[432]Although this is what Paul is perceived to be saying elsewhere in Acts. Cf. Acts 19:26: Καὶ θεωρεῖτε καὶ ἀκούετε ὅτι οὐ μόνον Ἐφέσου, ἀλλὰ σχεδὸν πάσης τῆς Ἀσίας, ὁ Παῦλος οὗτος πείσας μετέστησεν ἱκανὸν ὄχλον, λέγων ὅτι οὐκ εἰσὶν θεοὶ οἱ διὰ χειρῶν γινόμενοι.

Isa 42:17; 44:9-17; Wis 13:10-14:10; Philo, *Dec.* 70433), a type of argument which, as seen in the previous chapter, is also found in some Graeco-Roman writers who complain about people mistaking the image for the god himself (e.g., Seneca, Plutarch).[434]

Rather verse 29 focuses on what the divine is similar to, or in that case, what the divine is not similar to: οὐκ ὀφείλομεν νομίζειν […] τὸ θεῖον εἶναι ὅμοιον […]. This type of argument is also found in the LXX, for example in Isa 40:18–20:

> To whom will you liken the Lord and to what likeness will you liken him? [τίνι ὡμοιώσατε κύριον καὶ τίνι ὁμοιώματι ὡμοιώσατε αὐτόν;] Does not a craftsman make an image [εἰκόνα], or a goldsmith set it by overlaying it with gold and fashioning it as a likeness [ὁμοίωμα]? For the artisan chooses unrotten wood and wisely seeks how he can set his image [εἰκόνα] so that it might not shake. [MC]

Importantly, then, the verse rejects the affirmation that the divine could be similar to, or represented by, objects of gold, silver or stone. It is concerned with divine-likeness, rather than mistaken identification of man-made statues with the divine.

Second, although many commentators interpret γένος οὖν ὑπάρχοντες τοῦ θεοῦ as pointing to the faculty of reason of mankind, as discussed earlier, the metaphor rather points to God's providential care to ensure humanity's *life*. The basis of the argument in v. 29 is thus the divine origin of the *liveliness* of humanity, a reading confirmed by the emphasis the rest of the sentence puts on the quality of *lifelessness* of idols by fore-fronting the material in which they are made: χρυσῷ ἢ ἀργύρῳ ἢ λίθῳ.[435] Indeed, the word order suggests an emphasis as follows:

> γένος οὖν ὑπάρχοντες τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ὀφείλομεν νομίζειν **χρυσῷ ἢ ἀργύρῳ ἢ λίθῳ**, χαράγματι τέχνης καὶ ἐνθυμήσεως ἀνθρώπου, τὸ θεῖον εἶναι ὅμοιον.
> Therefore, since we are God's offspring, we ought not to believe it is to *gold, silver and stone*, objects graven by of the art and imagination of mankind, that the divine is similar.

The verse thus smoothly builds upon the assertion in v. 28 that humanity 'lives, moves and is' in God. Since humanity 'moves' and 'lives' in God, we must not believe that the divine is like lifeless objects. Again, the idea follows nicely the quote from Epimenides, which points to humanity's life to denounce the lie about Zeus' death.

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[433]τὰ δ' ὑπ' ἐκείνων δημιουργηθέντα πλάσματα καὶ ζωγραφήματα θεοὺς ἐνόμισαν.

[434]See preceding chapter and Decharme 1904.

[435]Note that χαράγματι stands in apposition to χρυσῷ ἢ ἀργύρῳ ἢ λίθῳ.

The mention of the material out of which statues are made to underscore their lifelessness and thus unworthiness to represent the divine is attested both in Jewish and Graeco-Roman texts. Jewish literature regularly points to the gold, silver or wood out of which idols are made to underscore their lifelessness and inability to move, hear or see. For example, Ps 115:4-8 reads:

> [4] Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands.
>
> [5] They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see.
>
> [6] They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell.
>
> [7] They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; they make no sound in their throats.
>
> [8] Those who make them are like them; so are all who trust in them. (NRSV)

Likewise, it was not uncommon for Graeco-Roman philosophers to point to the material and lifeless quality of divine representations as one of their important limitations as representation of the gods. For example, concerning the statue of Zeus, Chrysostom writes:

> But if, again, anyone thinks that the material used is too lacking in distinction to be in keeping with the god, his belief is true and correct. But neither those who furnished it, nor the man who selected and approved it, has he any right to criticize. For there was no other substance better or more radiant to the sight that could have come into the hands of man and have received artistic treatment. To work up air, at any air, or fire, or 'the copious sources of water,' what tools possessed by mortal men can do that? These can work upon nothing but whatever hard residuary substance is held bound within all these elements. I do not mean gold or silver, for these are trivial and worthless things, but the essential substance, though all through and heavy; and to select each kind of material and entwining them together to compose every species, both of animals and of plants—this is a thing which is impossible even to the gods, all except this God alone, one may almost say, whom another poet quite beautifully has addressed as follows: Lord of Dodona, father almighty, consummate artist. For he is indeed the first and most perfect artificer, who has taken as his coadjutor in his art, not the city of Elis, but the entire material of the entire universe. (Chrysostom *Or.*12.80–81 [LCL])

Such an assertion shows that lifeless material cannot really represent the divine worthily, even though it is the best a sculptor can do. In this particular case, it emphasizes that only creation – nature – is worthy of representing god and that only the highest god – Zeus – has the ability to create such a representation. Plutarch and Seneca make similar reflections about the superiority of living divine

representations.[436] In fact, Plutarch defends the Egyptian practice of worshipping the divine through living animals precisely on the account that, unlike lifeless representations, they are living and thus a better 'mirror' of the divine (*Is. Os.* 382AC).

Furthermore, Stoic philosophers like Seneca and Epictetus for example, precisely contrast material divine representations with humanity in their teaching on piety, emphasizing that it is more important to 'mould oneself in the likeness of God' than to mould images of gold and silver which cannot really represent the divine. Thus, Seneca writes:

> 'And mould thyself to be worthy of god.'[437] However you will not mould with gold or silver; an image cannot be formed in the likeness of god out of such materials [*non potest ex hac materia imago deo exprimi similis*]; remember that the gods, when they were well-disposed, were made of clay. (Seneca *Ep.* 31.11 [MC])

And Epictetus makes similar affirmations:

> You are bearing God about with you, you poor wretch, and know it not! Do you suppose I am speaking of some external God, made of silver or gold? It is within yourself that you bear Him, and do you not perceive that you are defiling Him with impure thoughts and filthy actions. […] Nay, if you were a statue of Pheidias, his Athena or his Zeus, you would have remembered both yourself and your artificer, and if you had any power of perception you would have tried to do nothing unworthy of him that had fashioned you, nor of yourself, and you would have tried not to appear in an unbecoming attitude before the eyes of men; but as it is, because Zeus has made you, do you on that account not care what manner of person you show yourself to be? […] but the works of God are capable of movement, have the breath of life, can make use of external impressions, and pass judgement upon them. Do you dishonour the workmanship of this Craftsman, when you are yourself that workmanship? (Epictetus II.12-23 [LCL])

Again, those passages emphasize the superiority of humanity as an 'image' of god because it is alive and has perceptions. At the same time, it underscores that the Stoics believed that it was humanity's responsibility to mould oneself in the likeness of the gods by pursuing an ethical and wise life. As discussed in the preceding chapter, the Stoic believed that humanity bears a kinship with the divine, a

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[436]See for example: Seneca *Ep.*31.11 or *De Superst.* (*apud Augustine De Civitate Dei* 6.10): 'To beings who are sacred, immortal and inviolable, [people] consecrate images of the cheapest inert material.' This materiality does not necessarily lead to a rejection of those images, but it is an acknowledged limitation of those representations.

[437]Vergil *Aen*. 8.364f.

part of the *logos* in its breast. True piety thus consists in living according to this rationality – according to nature, as they often put it – and thus reflect this Logos.

Such motifs show that a Greek audience would easily have picked on the contrast between γένος οὖν ὑπάρχοντες τοῦ θεοῦ and χρυσῷ ἢ ἀργύρῳ ἢ λίθῳ, namely between the living quality of humanity, and the lifelessness of images. With those two clarifications in mind, we can now attempt to unpack this difficult verse.

5.3.2.   The divine and man-made images

V. 29, harking back to v. 23, denounces what the Athenians 'worship in their ignorance.'

> γένος οὖν ὑπάρχοντες τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ὀφείλομεν νομίζειν χρυσῷ ἢ ἀργύρῳ ἢ λίθῳ, χαράγματι τέχνης καὶ ἐνθυμήσεως ἀνθρώπου, τὸ θεῖον εἶναι ὅμοιον. (Act 17:29)
> *Therefore, being the offspring of God, we do not have to believe that what is divine is similar to gold, silver and stone, objects of the art and imagination of man.*

τὸ θεῖον most likely recalls the neuter relative pronoun of v. 23: 'what (ὃ) you worship in ignorance, this (τοῦτο) I am announcing to you.' It is common to interpret τὸ θεῖον as pointing to the creator God Paul has been talking about. But the sudden change from the masculine θεός to the neuter τὸ θεῖον suggests that the speech at least temporarily distinguishes God from 'the divine' spoken about more generally here.[438] This confirms that the Athenians are not worshipping the God (θεός) Paul has been talking about in the speech, even indirectly. Indeed, since they use man-made objects to represent and worship 'the divine,' the Athenians cannot be worshipping this God.

The basis of the argument is that humanity's life is provided and guaranteed by God, as suggested by the causal γένος οὖν ὑπάρχοντες τοῦ θεοῦ. To paraphrase the argument then: since we have our life from God, we must not believe that the divine is like the lifeless things made by man.

This is the point to examine in more detail another interpretation of this verse advanced by some scholars, namely that it builds upon an *imago dei* theology and implies that since humanity is God's offspring, it is only humanity which can represent God.[439] The verse would thus read as a contrast between humanity and idols as images of the divine:

> Since *we* are the offspring of God, we ought not to believe that it is *to gold, silver and stone, objects of the art and imagination of man,* that the divine is similar.

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[438]Nowhere in Luke-Acts is θεῖον used to talk about God.

[439]Nasrallah 2010:114-115; Jipp 2012:585; cf. also the brief mention in Jervell 1998:450.

Several scholars have indeed suggested that Luke uses γένος τοῦ θεοῦ in verses 28-29 as an allusion to the biblical concept of humanity's creation in the image of God (cf. Gen 1:26-27).[440] Jipp sees a confirmation of this reading in the mention of the creation of humanity ἐξ ἑνός which Luke's audience would have linked to Adam, who is precisely created in God's image.[441]

As discussed earlier, the speech does indeed present the creator God's relationship to humanity along lines evocative of, and as a reversal of, the relationship which humanity has with its idols. Despite this, however, the claim that the speech argues that humanity is God's image (or his 'idol') over against man-made idols, goes beyond what the text warrants and appears problematic for three reasons. First, it is questionable that Luke understands γένος τοῦ θεοῦ as a reference to humanity being created in God's image.[442] As discussed earlier, the expression refers to God's provision of life and care for humanity. This idea does not correspond to the way ancient Jewish sources usually interpreted humanity's creation in God's image, although Luke could admittedly be innovative here. While Jewish interpretations vary, they tend to interpret it as humanity's ability either to rule on creation (e.g., Sirach 17:3) or to live an ethical life, i.e. the ability to discern between good and evil (e.g., 2 En 65:2).[443] A second element which mitigates such an interpretation, is the way Luke depicts humanity as 'fumbling' in its attempt to touch and find God. This is not the positive description which we would expect if Luke was suggesting that humanity is God's image. Finally, the fact that the speech never explicitly *states* that humanity is God's image raises questions for this exegesis. In fact, as some scholars have noted, what is surprising about v. 29 is precisely that it does *not* say explicitly what we would expect, namely that humanity, and not idols, is the image of God.[444] Rather, it only says, 'since we are God's offspring (i.e. he provides for our life), we must not believe that it is to lifeless objects created by man that the divine is similar.'

Having voiced those caveats, however, this verse *does* suggest that humanity witnesses to God's nature—in this case to his living nature—over against idols. This contrast is strongly emphasized in that v. 29 builds upon v. 28 which has just affirmed that human beings 'live, move and are' in God, a description which contrasts directly with the gold, silver and stone out of which the objects of the art and imagination of man are made. In his study, Gärtner argued that the three verbs used in this line—live, move and are—often occur in biblical anti-idol polemics to describe idols negatively, especially in contrast to Yahweh.[445] Thus idols 'don't live,' but they are dead in contrast to

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[440]Jervell 1998:449; cf. Nauck 1956:22-23.

[441]Jipp 2012:585.

[442]Some exegetes explicitly reject this interpretation. Cf. Dibelius 1939:52.

[443]On the meaning of the *imago dei* in Judaism, cf. Jervell 1960.

[444]Conzelmann 1987:145: 'But the obvious synthesis, that humanity is in the image of the living God, is not spelled out.'

[445]Gärtner 1955:219-23.

the living God,[446] and they have 'no spirit' in them.[447] Likewise, idols 'don't move' but need to be carried around upon the shoulders of their makers (Isa 46:7). Finally, Jewish traditions often emphasize the non-existence of idols and the fact that they are nothing (1 Sam 12:21). Although v.28a most likely comes from Epimenides then, in the context of an anti-idol polemic, it possibly also evokes biblical and Jewish rhetoric against idolatry. It is easy to see why an author with as much affinity with the LXX as Luke would have found the quotation particularly useful in this context.

There is thus a contrast between human beings and idols in verses 28-29: unlike idols, humanity *does* live, move and exist. The phrase γένος οὖν ὑπάρχοντες τοῦ θεοῦ, however, also stresses another important element: the fact that humanity's life originates with and is guaranteed *by God*. And this stands in strong contrast to the objects of golds, silver and stone, whose creator is *humanity*. The importance of this point in the argument is underscored by the emphasis the verse puts on the creativity of human beings in the production of cultic images, describing them not just as 'made by man,' but as 'carved work made by the art and imagination of man' (χαράγματι τέχνης καὶ ἐνθυμήσεως ἀνθρώπου). At the heart of the comparison then, also lie the different creators of humanity and idols. The phrase emphasizes the *divine* origin and guarantee of humanity's life, over against the *human* origin of idols' 'life.' A paraphrase of the verse would thus read:

> Therefore, since we are God's offspring and *he*—and not human beings! —guarantees our life, we don't have to believe that what is divine is similar to lifeless objects, who are, they, the product of the art and imagination of *man*—and not God.

In this paraphrase, οὐκ ὀφείλομεν is translated with the nuance of 'we don't have to' rather than the usual 'we should not' adopted by most interpreters. Both translations can be justified. Generally, however, ὀφείλω means 'to owe' 'to be bound to' or 'to be obliged to.' It is the vocabulary of debt and refers to what a person is obligated to render to another. While it might seem strange at first to translate ὀφείλω with this nuance at the height of an anti-idol polemic, it would make sense in the context of a discourse concerned with piety and *deisidaimonia*—the fear of the gods. Based on the fact that humanity's life is provided by *God*—and not man—humanity is not bound to believe that what is divine is similar to lifeless objects—which are, they, made by man—and worship and fear

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[446]Wis 13:10: 'But miserable, with their hopes set on dead things, are those who give the name "gods" to the works of human hands…' See also Ps 115:5-7 which describes their lack of common signs of life: They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. ⁶They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. ⁷They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; they make no sound in their throats.

[447]In this respect, it is interesting that Paul's anger at the idols in Athens is described as 'his spirit *in him* being angered when he sees the city full of idols: παρωξύνετο τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ **ἐν αὐτῷ** θεωροῦντος κατείδωλον οὖσαν τὴν πόλιν.

such 'divinities.' On this reading then, verse 29 not only denounces false images of the divine and thus false perception of the divine, but also claims that there is no need to worship or fear such 'divinities,' since *God* is the provider of human life. The verse thus also addresses the *deisidaimonia* of the Athenians, i.e. their concern and fear of hostile gods.

5.4. Divine justice and divine representation (17: 30-31)

τοὺς μὲν οὖν χρόνους τῆς ἀγνοίας ὑπεριδὼν ὁ θεός, τὰ νῦν παραγγέλλει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πάντας πανταχοῦ μετανοεῖν, ³¹καθότι ἔστησεν ἡμέραν ἐν ᾗ μέλλει κρίνειν τὴν οἰκουμένην ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ, ἐν ἀνδρὶ ᾧ ὥρισεν, πίστιν παρασχὼν πᾶσιν ἀναστήσας αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν. (Acts 17:30-31)

Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people to repent everywhere, because he has fixed a day on which he is going to judge the inhabited world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, giving proof to all by raising him from the dead.

In verses 30 and 31, the speech's argument reaches its climax. Indeed, it picks up the theme of ignorance which the speech claimed to address in the *propositio* (cf. v. 23). Those verses announce the consequence (cf. οὖν) of v. 29 and thus of the whole argument of the speech which has culminated in v. 29. As discussed in the introduction, however, the relationship between this climax and the rest of the speech has often puzzled commentators. Indeed, this conclusion abruptly introduces its only specifically Christian material by mentioning the resurrection of Jesus and the coming judgment through him, a conclusion which seems to have little connection with the rest of the discourse. It thus appears to be, to use Dibelius' famous words, a kind of 'Christian appendix' to an otherwise Hellenistic sermon, or, some might say, to an otherwise Jewish anti-idol polemic.[448] In addition, it is often noted that the mention of a final judgment and the resurrection to an audience such as the Athenians lacks plausibility, since the Greeks did not believe in a final judgment nor in the resurrection.[449] Aeschylus' famous line shows that the Greeks both understood what the concept of resurrection meant—i.e. the physical return to life of the body—and that they did not believe in it.[450]

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[448]'We see that it is a monotheistic sermon and only the conclusion makes it a Christian one. [. . .] In any case, the specifically Christian content of the speech is presented only in the last two verses.' Dibelius 1939:27.

[449]It is often asserted that Stoics would have been more open than Epicureans to the teaching of the resurrection, but this is speculative. While some evidence suggests that some Stoics believed in a time of afterlife before the *ekpurosis,* there is no question of resurrection in Stoicism.

[450]For this view see, for example, Wright's treatment in 2003; contra Porter 1999b.

When the dust has soaked up a man's blood,

Once he is dead, there is no resurrection. (Aeschylus, *Eum.* 647-48)

In that context, Luke's description of the resurrection as a 'proof' is puzzling at best. Thus, more than anywhere else in the discourse, Luke seems to strain historical credibility at this point. Indeed, summing up his assessment of the speech, Pervo writes: 'A cultured Greek would dismiss these brief words as a stylistically inadequate and muddled collection of clichés with an unexpected and improbable conclusion […]'[451]

At the same time, despite the appearance of specifically Jewish and Christian elements in those final verses, exegetes also often note that even in this part of the speech, the discourse avoids the mention of historical parts of the kerygma which would have been unknown to the audience and thus made little sense to them. Most strikingly, the speech does not mention Jesus' name, nor the fact that he was put to death by the Jews, two elements which otherwise occur almost invariably in the 'missionary' speeches in Acts. This suggests that even in those verses, Luke takes care to craft a discourse appropriate to his audience, and does not, as a hypothesis suggests, only include this Christian part in the speech mechanically because it is part of a common 'schema' of missionary speeches in Acts.

This section demonstrates the connection of this conclusion with the rest of the speech and argues that, far from being a disconnected part of the speech which would not have made sense to the audience, it represents its climax and follows a logic which – while undoubtedly surprising and even laughable for some of the Athenians– would have been understandable for an audience with philosophical sensibilities.

5.4.1. The universal call to repentance

As a consequence of the denunciation of v. 29 (cf. οὖν), verse 30 proclaims a divine command to repent. This call to repentance begins by asserting that 'God has overlooked the times of ignorance' (τοὺς μὲν οὖν χρόνους τῆς ἀγνοίας ὑπεριδὼν ὁ θεός). The terminology of ἀγνοία recalls the characterization of the Athenians as 'ignorant' (ἀγνοοῦντες) at the beginning of the speech as well as the altar 'to an unknown god' (Ἀγνώστῳ θεῳ). Its connection to v. 29 suggests that it refers specifically to the times characterized by the belief that the divine is like the lifeless objects made by human craft or represented by them. 'Ignorance' here does therefore not refer to a lack of information, but, as often in the literature, to a distortion or a mistaken notion of the divine: the mistaken belief that the divine is like lifeless objects made by human beings.

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[451]Pervo 2008:430. See also Dunn (1996:237) on v. 30 and the mention of a judgment in righteousness: 'At this point the cameo character of Luke's presentation, simply alluding in a phrase to a whole theme requiring a much fuller exposition, diminishes the credibility of the picture he here paints.'

The command then most probably refers to the necessity to repent from the belief that the divine is similar to lifeless objects created by human beings (cf. οὖν in v. 30). The divine – i.e. what is truly divine – cannot be represented by 'dead' things. At the same time, the fact that the reason given for the command to repent is God's coming judgment in righteousness probably also implies a repentance from injustice or wickedness more generally. Indeed, the universality of the call to repentance – which implies that it is addressed not only to Athenians worshipping idols but to all humanity – would corroborate such an understanding. Furthermore, in Acts the proclamation of the Christian message is generally accompanied by a call to repent from sins and wickedness (Acts 2:38; 3:26; 24:15-16; 24:25; 26:20; cf. Lk 24:46-47).[452] Those elements suggest that the repentance called for in v.29 is also ethical. As will be seen, this is confirmed by the speech's proclamation of true divine representation.

As discussed in the previous chapter, piety had important ethical implications for both Stoic and Epicurean (and indeed also Platonist) philosophers, since it took the form of an emulation or assimilation with the divine (i.e. godlikeness). It therefore also implied being righteous like the gods. The move from a denunciation of inappropriate divine representations to a call to repentance from injustice in a speech on piety would thus not have been unexpected for an audience philosophically aware.[453] As we have seen, it is human beings who were to be, ultimately, 'like the gods' for the philosophers, but to be so, they had to emulate their goodness or their righteousness.

The close connection which the speech makes in those verses (vv.29-31) between the belief in a divine which would be represented by lifeless or dead things and God's coming judgment in righteousness, might also suggest that God's true representation – which can only be living! – plays a role in the enactment of divine justice.

5.4.2. A judgment in righteousness

The basis for the call to repentance to the whole world is the proclamation of God's coming judgment in righteousness (v. 31: καθότι ἔστησεν ἡμέραν ἐν ᾗ μέλλει κρίνειν τὴν οἰκουμένην ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ). Although, unlike many Jews, neither the Greeks generally, nor their philosophers, believed in a

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[452]Despite what is sometimes said in the literature (Vielhauer 1966:36; Dibelius 1939:58), the meaning of μετάνοια as a regret and change from sinful or unrighteous behaviour would have been perfectly understandable to a Greek audience in such a context. See for example, Plutarch: god '[…] distinguishes whether the passions of the sick soul to which he administers his justice will in any way yield and make room for repentance (μετάνοιαν), and for those in whose nature vice is not unrelieved or intractable, he assigns a period of grace….to those whose sinfulness is likely to have sprung from ignorance of good rather than from preference of evil, he grants time for reform; however, if they persist in evil, then to these he assigns suitable punishment.' (*Sera* 551D [LCL]) On the meaning of μετάνοια in Classical and Hellenistic literature, cf. Nave 2002:40-70.

[453]Philosophically speaking, the lack of ethical godlikeness is the result of false conceptions of the divine.

coming day of judgment, the idea that the gods exercise post-mortem retribution and reward was common.[454] Furthermore, as the last chapter has highlighted, the philosophical debate on the nature of the gods and *deisidaimonia* precisely involved a discussion of how the gods or god are not evil but act righteously towards human beings. The fact that the speech climaxes on a demonstration of divine righteousness in connection with divine-likeness – as we shall see – is thus perfectly consistent with the philosophical context suggested by the narrative.

In the context at hand, the words 'in righteousness' (ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ) most likely mean that God will give each one what he/she deserves. The next precision about this divine judgment is that it will be 'through a man' (ἐν ἀνδρί). Again, although commentators have often asserted that the mention of this 'man' seems without any relation to the rest of the speech and wondered why the name of Jesus is not mentioned, the exegesis of the speech suggested thus far in this chapter highlights a perfectly coherent argument at this point. Indeed, v. 31 highlights that *God is actually represented by a man,* and that it is through this man that he exercises justice. This follows nicely from v. 29, which has just denounced the belief that the divine is similar to lifeless objects made by human beings in light of the fact that God provides life to humanity: God's resurrection and appointment of this man to represent him sets this man in stark contrast with the idols denounced in v. 29. Furthermore, as anticipated, v. 31 does indeed confirm that God's living representation is involved in the exercise of divine justice, thereby also giving the nuance of a warning to the exhortation in v. 29: we don't have to believe that the divine is represented by lifeless things, and we would be foolish to do so for lifeless representations will obviously never ensure justice![455]

The speech thus announces that God will judge in righteousness through his representative who is a man. One might wonder at this point whether the fact that God will judge humanity *through a man* also suggests that this representative is the very means by which God executes a judgment *in righteousness* – namely, whether this is how he guaranties that each one receives what he/she deserves. This is the hypothesis examined in the next section.

5.4.3. The role of humanity in God's righteous judgment

Verse 31 thus announces that God will judge in righteousness through a human being who will represent him. It thereby seems to suggest that humanity itself plays a part in the way God exercises his righteous judgment. The speech is very concise, and the interpretation suggested here must remain tentative.

Tentatively then, I would like to suggest that v. 31 intimates that God exercises his righteous judgment by letting humanity represent the divine, or by letting it function like 'gods' or 'idols.' This

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[454]Also for some Stoics and the Platonists.

[455]See the similar idea in *Wis* 14:27-29, where the fact that idols are dead and do not punish the wicked leads to an abundance of wickedness in people's life.

is indeed the function which the risen man has now received since he represents God. The proclamation that humanity will be judged by a risen man might thus serve to reveal that, in God's righteousness, human beings will be judged through a God in their own likeness – the risen man. As discussed earlier, the speech has suggested that a reversal has taken place in the human-divine relationship, but it also highlights that human beings strangely conceive of their gods as if they were like them: in need of food and housing, and like human beings, unable to give life to lifeless things and create true images of God (v. 29).

Still tentatively, this reading would explain *deisidaimonia* – humanity's fear of evil gods – as the consequence of humanity's own wickedness and injustice. Human beings fear wicked and unjust gods because they themselves are wicked and unjust. As discussed in the preceding chapter, the philosophers – especially the Stoics – apparently made a similar connection when they denounced the way some anthropomorphic representations of the gods were conducive to *deisidaimonia*. For the philosophers, however, such 'anthropomorphisation' of the gods was mistaken, since the gods can only be good and cannot commit evil. In answer to this fear then, as discussed in the last chapter, the philosophers emphasized that the gods are not evil but good and just and thus need not to be feared.

According to Acts 17, however, *deisidaimonia* is not just a cognitive mistake which needs to be treated through right reasoning, but is actually a sign of God's righteous judgment: human beings will indeed be judged in righteousness by a god in their own image, and they must therefore repent.

5.4.4. The resurrection and true divine representation

Verse 31 states that God has given 'proof of this by raising him from the dead' (πίστιν παρασχὼν πᾶσιν ἀναστήσας αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν. Scholars debate whether the resurrection is the proof that this man has been appointed by God to judge the world,[456] that God will judge the world,[457] or both.[458] The suggestion here is that the resurrection demonstrates the godlikeness of the man in question and thereby also the nature of God and his righteousness.

If verse 31 highlights the outworking of God's righteousness, it also reveals the nature of true divine representation, and what God is truly like. Indeed, by announcing that God intends to judge the inhabited world in righteousness *through a man* divinely appointed and risen from the dead, the speech implies that this divinely chosen man is worthy to *represent* God. True divine representation or godlikeness is thus not represented by gold, silver and stone, but by the living risen man. His resurrection by God presents him in powerful contrast with the lifeless idols which are created by men and were denounced as inappropriate divine representations in v. 29.

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[456]Barrett 2004:853; Haenchen 1971:526; Pervo 2008:440.

[457]Marguerat 2015:163.

[458]Jervell 1998:450.

True godlikeness is thus embodied in a resurrected man. And this human being is characterized by eternal life and righteousness. The righteousness of this man is evident by the role which is given to him, namely to be the one through whom God will judge the world *in righteousness*. To be worthy to be God's representative as the one exercising the judgment of the whole world, this man must be uncharacteristically righteous. In both Jewish and Greek traditions such tasks are indeed attributed to unusually righteous people. The belief that the righteous will judge the world is common in Jewish thought (Dan 7:22; Wis 3:7-8; 1QpHab 5:4). And similar ideas are found in Greek literature, where righteous people are appointed with the task of judging mankind. For example, in Greek mythology both Rhadamanthus and Minos were appointed judges of the dead because of their great justice:

> Moreover, because of his [Rhadamanthus'] very great justice [δικαιοσύνης], the myth has sprung up that he was appointed to be judge in Hades, where his decisions separate the good from the wicked. And the same honour has also been attained by Minos, because he ruled wholly in accordance with law [νομιμώτατα] and paid greatest heed to justice [δικαιοσύνης]. (Diodorus Siculus, 5.79.2 [LCL])

In addition, this man's righteousness is most likely implied by the declaration that God raised him from the dead. Indeed, resurrection into eternal life was for many Jews the reward of righteousness. Luke seems to endorse this belief by putting a similar logic in Jesus' mouth when he speaks of 'those who are considered worthy to attain that age and the resurrection from the dead' (Lk 20:35: οἱ δὲ καταξιωθέντες τοῦ αἰῶνος ἐκείνου τυχεῖν καὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως τῆς ἐκ νεκρῶν). And as already mentioned, some Jewish texts reflect the belief that the resurrected righteous will judge the world, and particularly the wicked.

As for the Greeks, although they did not believe in the resurrection, they did, however, consider immortality to be the reward of godlikeness.[459] It is clear that God's resurrection of this man to establish him as judge implies a gift of eternal life and that it is not just a momentary physical reanimation. From a Greek perspective, then, this man has received a kind of immortality which confirms his godlikeness and would imply that he has been divinized. It is thus unsurprising that some of the Athenians believed that Paul was announcing foreign divinities when he was announcing Jesus and the resurrection (v.18). The risen Jesus can easily be interpreted as a new foreign divinity.

The mention of the risen man who will represent God thus follows nicely the call to repent both from belief in divinities which are like lifeless statues and from unrighteousness. Indeed, it highlights that godlikeness – God's true image – is represented by a righteous risen man, not by lifeless objects, nor by humanity generally: the creator God is represented by a man characterized by (eternal) life and

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[459]Of course, the nature of this immortality was understood differently by the various philosophers. The Epicureans, for example, did not conceive of this 'immortality' as a form of afterlife. Cf. Warren 2011.

righteousness. God's resurrection of this man, and his appointment of him to represent him as judge, is thus a reaffirmation of God's life-giving power affirmed throughout the speech, and the climactic proclamation—and indeed a revelation—of what God is truly like. God is a living and righteous God, and this living and righteous God is represented by a man who died and was risen from the dead.

The risen man thus reveals the nature of godlikeness and true piety: the man who was raised from the dead *is* the image of God, and the one human beings should revere and emulate instead of lifeless images, in order to worship the true (and righteous) God.

Here lies the logic of v. 23: 'what you revere unknowingly or mistakenly, this I am announcing to you.' As highlighted by v. 29, the Athenians worship a divinity which is like gold, silver and stone and thus cannot be truly divine. They worship a divine which is like themselves (in need of housing, food and life). Instead, the speech calls them to worship the God represented by the risen man, through the risen man. Piety, according to the speech, thus implies to repent from false divine representations and from unrighteousness, and instead believe that the life-giving and righteous God is represented by the righteous man who died and was risen from the dead by this God.

Finally, the resurrection also stresses God's gift of eternal life as that which makes humanity truly godlike.[460] As v. 29 emphasized, because *God* provides life to humanity, it is not necessary to believe that the divine is represented by what is lifeless. Indeed, God is not like men who cannot give life to the statues they make, but he gives life to what is lifeless. Although this interpretation must also remain tentative, the speech thus seems to imply that, by resurrecting this man, God also opened up the way for the rest of humanity to receive eternal life. This might be what is also proved by the resurrection (cf. πίστιν). It would explain why, in v. 32, the Athenians understood the speech to speak about 'a resurrection of dead persons' in the plural (ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν) and not just about 'a resurrection from the dead' (ἀνάστασιν ἐκ νεκρῶν) as would have been the case if the speech only announced the resurrection of Jesus. Such a reading is also suggested by the way Luke summarizes the message in Athens as 'the good news of Jesus and the resurrection' in v. 18 and possibly by the fact that part of the philosophers had the feeling that Paul was announcing new divinities in the plural. It is, in any case, corroborated by the description of the Christian message elsewhere in Acts as the proclamation of 'the resurrection from the dead in Jesus' (Acts 4:2: καταγγέλλειν ἐν τῷ Ἰησοῦ τὴν ἀνάστασιν τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν).

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[460]The motif of Christians being perceived as 'gods' in human forms appears several times in Acts: Acts 14:11, 28:6, and possibly the fact that the Athenians thought that Paul was announcing new divinities in Acts 17.

5.5.   Conclusion

The present chapter has argued that the speech in Acts 17 should be understood as a discourse addressing the Athenian concern of maintaining peace with the gods and preventing their hostility. Pointing to the many idols (σεβάσματα) of the Athenians and using an altar devoted to an 'unknown god' as a sign of Athenian ignorance of the divine and their concern about divine harm, Luke's Paul announces that he is proclaiming the true nature of what they are revering ignorantly, namely mistakenly.

Rather than introducing Yahweh to the Athenians as a new God whom they do not know, or as the God whom they are already unwittingly worshipping, the speech thus aims to present the true image or representation of the creator God, thereby indicating what the creator God is like, and the means by which the Athenians can worship this God 'in knowledge' and have peace with him. Unsurprisingly in the context of a debate on *deisidaimonia* and the nature of the gods with the philosophers, the speech also demonstrates that this God is righteous by highlighting the way he gives human beings what they deserve, but is uninvolved in evil.

The speech thus begins by emphasizing that the creator God cannot be worshipped along traditional means – i.e. by providing him with temples and services – because *he* provides everything to everybody. This God – through one – created all the nations of men, so that they would dwell upon the whole earth, providing them with set seasons and boundaries to their dwelling. This, God did so that humanity would seek him, if it could possibly touch and find him. The reason for this is that God is not far from each one of us, since he provides humanity's life and move, and continually sustains their life like a father (v.28).

The speech thus depicts God's relationship to human beings along lines reminiscent of the relationship which human beings have with the idols of their gods: they erect idols at different sites in the world to connect with the god represented by the idol, provide them with dwelling places (temples) and services (food), and use them in the traditional cult, among other reasons, because their materiality enables human beings to 'touch' and connect to the god. At the same time, the speech never explicitly identifies human beings as God's image, and in fact, the verb used to describe the human search for God - ψηλαφάω – rather suggests the attempt of a blind man to feel its way. As mentioned earlier, intriguingly in light of the implicit comparison of human beings with 'idols,' ψηλαφάω is also the verb used in the LXX to describe idols which have hands but cannot 'feel.'

The speech then moves towards its climax and conclusion. Based upon the claims that God is the provider and sustainer of human life in v.28, verse 29 thus argues that we need not believe that the divine – what is truly divine and needs to be worshiped and feared – is similar to lifeless gold, silver and stone, which are statues made by *men.*

In verse 30-31, the speech thus reaches its conclusion: God has overlooked the times of ignorance, but he now commands all human beings everywhere to repent because he is about to judge

the world in righteousness. Human beings are thus to repent from believing that the divine can be similar to lifeless things, but also from unrighteousness. Indeed, God is in fact represented by a human being who is very well alive, and through whom God will exercise his justice.

The argument thus seems to suggest that God will exercise his justice through humanity itself, a reading which would explain the call to repentance both from believing that the divine is similar to lifeless things but also from unrighteousness. At the same time, God's resurrection of this man shows that *he* is God's true representative. He is truly righteous and godlike, and he represents the God who is righteous, eternal and gives life to the dead.

The speech thus proclaims that the righteous and life-giving God is represented by a man who died and rose from the dead. It is him who reveals God's true nature – his eternal life, his goodness, and his righteousness. It is through him that true worship of the true God is revealed: indeed, it is this representative that the Athenians should be revering and emulating in their pursuit of godlikeness.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

This chapter begins by discussing the light this project sheds on the relationship between the speech in Acts 17 and Greek philosophy, and how this new understanding sheds light on the argument of the discourse and on the function of Christology in the speech. The third section then discusses how this new interpretation challenges common scholarly assessments about the nature of Christian preaching to the Gentiles in Acts and its relationship with Jewish theology. Finally, this chapter concludes by considering some of the questions this project raises for the common interpretations of Luke's literary purpose. A discussion of the implications which this thesis would have for the much-debated question of Luke's Paulinism or his picture of Paul must, however, be left for another day.

6.1.   Making sense of the hellenization of the speech in Athens

As was highlighted in the introduction, a crucial methodological and interpretative question in the exegesis of this pericope concerns the meaning of the hellenization of the speech. Although scholars disagree on the extent and purpose of this hellenization, all concur that the speech is hellenized, and most have interpreted this hellenization as reflecting an attempt of some rapprochement with the audience in Athens, whether it is in terminology or in theology. Recently, however, Rowe challenged this interpretation by emphasizing the nature of ancient philosophy as complex traditions implying views of the world and of life incompatible with the vision of embedded life advocated by early Christianity.[461] For him, the propensity of past scholarship to interpret the parallels to Greek philosophy identified in the speech as signs of rapprochement is fallacious. The present project confirms the validity of Rowe's insight. Not only is this interpretation in tension with the narrative framework of the pericope (chapter 2), but it cannot be sustained in light of the historical situation presupposed by the narrative world of Acts 17 (chapter 4).

As chapter two shows, the perception of the Athenians of Paul's message as 'a new teaching' and their characterization of him as a *spermologos* or a 'proclaimer of foreign divinities' all suggest that his message was not perceived as congenial. At best, the term *spermologos* might imply that he used some philosophical language or arguments, but this was obviously not perceived as a rapprochement, since the term is derogatory.

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[461]For philosophy as an art of life and a life-long commitment to self-improvement so as 'to approximate ever closer to the ideals of character-structure and relation to the world established by the great philosophers,' see also Trapp 2014:49; Hadot 1995.

Chapter four corroborates Rowe's conclusion in a different way. As a study of the philosophical literature of Post-Hellenistic times shows, the philosophical teaching of the Epicureans and the Stoics on the gods, *deisidaimonia* and piety had several elements in common, and made some similar claims about the gods, yet they taught very different theologies and engaged in serious debate and polemics with each other about the exact nature of the divine and how it relates with humanity. In such a polemical context, the *significance* of the use of such common terminology and arguments to assess theological rapprochement is strongly diminished. For example, both the Stoics and the Epicureans claimed that the gods are not served by human hands and do not need temples. But the Epicureans would hardly have perceived the Stoic affirmation of this claim as a 'theological' rapprochement with their own theology! Rather, this claim was part of philosophical common places about the gods and piety.

In this light, the speech's claims that the divine does not live in temples made by human hands, nor is served by human hands are unlikely to have been perceived as a meaningful rapprochement by the Athenians, much less by any of the philosophical schools.[462] Likewise, the belief that God made the earth and all what is in it was shared by the Stoics and the Platonists, who again engaged in serious debates with each other about the nature of the divine. Consequently, this assertion is also unlikely to have been perceived by the Stoics as a 'significant' rapprochement with their own worldview. The fact that the speech claims several things which were shared by several philosophical schools which hotly debated with each other and engaged in polemics about the nature of the gods, *deisidaimonia* and piety strongly relativizes the significance of this 'common ground' in terms of the speech's relationship with a particular philosophical school or even Greek philosophy more generally.

As discussed in the introduction, studies on Hellenistic Judaism have drawn attention to the dangers of overinterpreting the significance of hellenization in a thoroughly hellenized environment. The present study suggests that the presence of philosophical common places in the Areopagus speech has too often been overinterpreted, especially as rapprochement with the theology of the audience, whereas it would simply have been the common type of vocabulary and arguments used to talk about the subject at hand with a Greek audience. Understanding the background debate and the polemics between Epicurean and Stoic philosophers on the question of piety and the nature of the gods thus helps to explain why they perceived Paul's teaching as alien rather than congenial, even if it *does* contain philosophical common places. What makes a teaching congenial in such a context is not the use of similar arguments and motifs, but the whole complex of theology and worldview in service to which those arguments and motifs are used.

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[462]Trapp (2014:51) notes that in the ancient world some people did occasionally try to focus on the common ground found in different philosophical schools rather than commit to a single one. But by and large, the default option, was 'to commit to one school of thought in distinction from the others, and to perpetuate the game of defending one's own and attacking the opposition by all means available.' Cf. Sedley 1989.

This project thus confirms Rowe's assertion that the speech cannot be interpreted as a theological rapprochement with Greek philosophy—at least not a significant one—and that methodologically its relationship with Greek philosophy cannot be evaluated by measuring their continuity and discontinuity with each other at the level of motifs or even arguments.[463] But whereas Rowe thereby concluded that the speech must be interpreted along Christian lines which would have been hardly understandable for the Athenians and failed to provide a convincing explanation for the presence of so much Greek philosophical common places in the speech, it is now possible to suggest a better explanation for this phenomenon and the speech's high degree of hellenization. Indeed, the narrative context (chapter 2) and the historical background (chapter 4) suggest that the similarity of terminology and argument of Acts 17 with Greek philosophical traditions reflects the speech's attempt to enter a debate or conversation with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers on piety, the nature of the gods, and the way to avert their hostility. Similarity of terminology and arguments thus does not reflect theological rapprochement but is the result of the topic at hand and the cultural background of the audience, a gathering which would have been aware of the main lines of the debate between Epicurean and Stoic philosophers on the topic of the nature of the gods, piety and *deisidaimonia*.

In this sense then, the speech in Athens *does* reflect a rapprochement with, and an important adaptation to, the audience at hand. But rather than a *significant* rapprochement with their theology, it is a rapprochement with their own debates on the questions of *deisidaimonia*, piety and the nature of the gods, and a willingness to use philosophical common places about the divine and piety in its own argumentation. Despite their common ground then, the speech, Stoicism and Epicureanism should be understood as different traditions of embedded life providing different answers to the questions of the nature of the gods and of piety.

6.2.   Addressing *deisidaimonia* in Athens: a new teaching

The problem in question, as highlighted by chapter three and four, concerns the question of proper piety and the means by which one averts divine hostility and maintains peace with the gods. This is what the study of *deisidaimonia* in early Post-Hellenistic literature in chapter 2 and among Stoic and Epicurean philosophers in chapter 3 highlights. To point out that the Athenians are δεισιδαιμονεστέρους in v. 22 is not a praise of their virtue of piety – that would have been expressed through the adjective εὐσεβής or θεοσεβής – but neither is it an insult or even a criticism of their irrational, polytheistic or idolatrous worship, as has often been assumed in scholarship. Rather it points to the Athenians' apparent (cf. ὡς) concern to avoid divine hostility and harm, a problem which Epicurean and Stoic philosophers themselves addressed. The purpose of the speech is thus not (only!)

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[463]This point had also been emphasized by Conzelmann 1966.

to introduce the true God to the Athenians because they do not know him but to explain how they can have peace with him and the divine generally. This, of course, necessitates that they understand his true nature, and thus how they can relate to him.

Indeed, as Luke puts it, the Athenians are worshipping ignorantly (ἀγνοοῦντες), namely mistakenly. They do not understand the true nature of the divine and therefore do not worship and relate to it appropriately. The association of *deisidaimonia* with ignorance echoes the diagnostic of both Epicurean and Stoic philosophers – the two sects with which Paul has been interacting just before the speech – on the question. The beginning of the speech therefore shows that the apostle tackles a 'religious concern' of the Athenians which the philosophers also aimed to address. According to the philosophers, however, Paul is proposing a 'new teaching' on this question (cf. καινὴ διδαχή in v.19), and thereby is characterized as a philosophical 'rival' of the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers.

As highlighted in chapter four, while they were critical of some aspects of traditional religion, both Epicureanism and Stoicism had not only accommodated most of it, but even found some truth and positive elements in it. Even the veneration of statues could under certain conditions have a positive function, as long as people had integrated that the god is not to be identified with the statue – an error which they frequently and vehemently denounced in popular worship. At the same time, both Epicurean and Stoic philosophers insisted that the gods do not need the service of human beings, and that true piety first of all constitutes in having a right opinion about the gods, and then in emulating them. Piety thus takes the form of an imitation of the divine, or godlikeness.

On the other hand, both the Stoics and the Epicureans denounced *deisidaimonia* as impiety because it is a fear – or sometimes by metonymy practices and beliefs associated with it – based on the mistaken belief that the gods are harmful and evil. Against it the Epicureans emphasized that the gods cannot be influenced by *ira* or *gratia*, and that they therefore do not interfere in human affairs and do not harm. The Stoics, on the other hand, emphasized that the god is good and provident, and that a right understanding of the good enables the wise to see that god is not evil.[464] The Epicureans and the Stoics thus agreed that the gods are not evil, but they hotly debated concerning the theology which demonstrated this, criticizing each other's view of the gods as a threat for piety and the moral fabric of society.

An understanding of the philosophical teaching on those questions helps to make sense of the motifs of the speech and its particular argumentation. For example, it explains why the speech does not denounce the equation of idols with gods – a move which would have made little sense to a philosophically educated audience – but denounces the belief in a divine which would be similar to or

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[464]It is important at this point to emphasize that the divine punishment of the wicked or injustice was not understood as harm or evil by the philosophers. On the contrary, it was seen as justice for the good, and healing for the wicked.

represented by material and lifeless statues. More importantly, it explains why the speech is not only concerned to denounce the use of idols in worship, but also about repentance, righteousness and godlikeness. Indeed, for the philosophers, piety is, above all, godlikeness: it is to imitate the gods and be a good and righteous person. Finally, understanding this context explains the concern of the speech with a demonstration of divine justice and judgment. Even though the Greeks did not believe in a final judgment, the way the gods give the wicked and the righteous what they deserve – and thus the demonstration of the gods' goodness and justice - was closely related to the debate of their nature and *deisidaimonia*.

As the analysis of the speech shows, its argument echoes several elements which the Epicureans and the Stoics said about piety: the divine does not live in temples and is not served by human hands because it does not need anything. Furthermore, like the Stoics, the discourse emphasizes that it is god who is beneficent to mankind and not the contrary. And like the philosophers, it also stresses that the divine cannot be fully worthily represented by lifeless objects. The speech departs from the philosophical schools, however, by calling all human beings to repent and announcing that God is represented by and judges through a man in righteousness, and that the proof of this is that God has risen him from the dead.

The speech is too short to make a full comparison with the teachings of Stoicism and Epicureanism on the question of piety and *deisidaimonia*. Tentatively, however, it can be said that unlike the philosophers who taught that human beings have to mould themselves in the likeness of the divine to reflect it and have peace with the gods, the speech seems to argue that the solution lies in believing that the true God is really represented by the risen man, and that this is a God who gives life to the dead (lifeless). This man is the one who truly represent God, and not other human beings. As the speech seems to suggest, the 'gods' which would be represented by humanity otherwise are really no gods, for they do not give life, have all kinds of needs, can be unjust and evil, and ultimately they die. Such gods indeed can only lead to *deisidaimonia.*

An understanding of the philosophical teaching on those questions thus both helps to make sense of the motifs of the speech and its particular argumentation. Most importantly, it shows that the Christological conclusion is not only connected with the rest of the speech, but in fact represent its climax. Indeed, the aim of the speech is to announce what can truly represent God and thus what he is like, and thereby how one is to have peace with the gods, and not fear their hostility and wrath anymore. This answer is only reached with the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus. As scholars have often noted, nothing which is said before this point is new for a philosophical audience. But the way such arguments are used to proclaim that the image of the righteous and living God is a resurrected man is entirely new.

6.3. Christology and the proclamation of the kerygma to the Gentiles in Acts

The interpretation argued for in this project has significant consequences for the assessment of the function of Christology in the speech in Athens and thus also of the nature of the Christian proclamation to the Gentiles in Acts. As mentioned in chapter four, it has been a consensus in scholarship that the purpose of the speech is to announce the nature of Yahweh, the creator of heaven and earth. Some scholars have even affirmed that the speech in Athens does not announce Jesus or the gospel at all, but that it only focuses on the doctrine of God. For Jervell, this reflects the fact that for Luke, the gospel is not preached outside of the synagogue. The speech is thus an anomaly in the book (*ein Fremdkörper*) meant to demonstrate 'das Nein der Kirche zum ausserjüdischen Heidentum.'[465] For Schnabel, this absence rather shows that the speech does not represent a typical missionary speech to the Gentiles.

> Paul's speech is traditionally regarded as an example of the early Christian missionary preaching before pagan audiences. However, in the context of Acts 17, Paul's speech is a special case of missionary preaching before Gentiles at best: the philosophers and the council members asked Paul to give an account of the deity that he was preaching. In other words, Paul did not explain his message of Jesus, Kyrios and Saviour of the world, when he spoke before the Areopagus; rather, he explained his concept of God. It is not only the historical context but also the flow of the argumentation of the speech itself that indicates that the only topic is the concept and the knowledge of God. Paul explains in his dialogue with the philosophers and council members who are present *one* of the themes that he presented in his public teaching activity, namely his doctrine of God.[466]

Other scholars, however, note that both v. 18 and 31 suggest that Jesus and the resurrection were part of the proclamation in Athens. For them, while the speech focuses on the proclamation of Yahweh, the narrative also makes clear that Jesus was part of the proclamation, although it follows the teaching about Yahweh. On this reading, however, the speech in Athens still differs significantly from other speeches addressed to the Jews in Acts, whose focus is on Jesus. Many scholars explain this difference by the context at hand and the necessity to first correct the Gentile's notion of the divine, before announcing Jesus. Indeed, whereas belief in the one true God can be presupposed with Jewish audiences in Acts, this monotheism must first be affirmed to the Gentile audience in Athens. For example, Dunn writes:

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[465]Jervell 1998:455.

[466]Schnabel 2005:178.

In short, the Christology is subordinated to the theology; the developing Christological distinctives of Christian faith are subordinated to the prior task of winning appropriate belief in God.[467]

While Dunn also notes that 'the focus on resurrection in both 17.18 and 31 confirms that in a Greek context as well as a Jewish (see on 2.24; also 4.1-2 and 23.6) the claim that God had raised Jesus from the dead stood at the centre of the Christian gospel,'[468] his commentary reflects the assumption that the proclamation to the Gentiles in Acts began with the proclamation of the Jewish God and monotheism—the first article of faith, and was then followed by the second one on Jesus.

The reading defended in this project, however, challenges this understanding. Indeed, it argues that Christology is the very climax of the speech because it represents the revelation of what *God* is like. In other words, Christology is neither subordinate nor complementary to the proclamation of the nature of God, it *is* the proclamation of the nature of God and how one is to relate to him. The righteous and risen man *is* the image of God, and it is only in him that true godlikeness and true piety are revealed. The speech is clearly unfinished and makes no meaningful or new assertion before the final verses proclaim the resurrection of Jesus, and therefore the nature of God's righteousness and true piety. Admittedly, the description of God implied in the first part of the speech forms the context in which the Christology of the final verses makes sense. In this sense, theology does open up the way to Christology in Acts 17. But it is the Christological part of the speech which, *in the context of the debates at hand*, represents the crucial and new affirmation about theology in the speech. It is the risen man which reveals God's justice and his goodness, and his power to give life to the dead.

This has important consequences for assessing how the Christian message and movement relate to Judaism and to the Gentiles in Acts, two central questions in Acts scholarship. It is not uncommon to find scholars affirming that the speech in Athens is 'an apology for the Jewish understanding of God'[469] or a defence of monotheism. But the speech significantly departs from classical apologetic Jewish presentations of God by claiming that this God is represented by a man who was risen from the dead. The speech's aim is thus not to proclaim the Jewish God and monotheism *and then* the Christian part of the kerygma, but to proclaim that the true powerful and righteous God is revealed in Jesus. This reading is corroborated by the fact that the Athenians did not perceive the apostle to be preaching Jewish doctrine, but some 'new teaching.' That the author believes that this *is* the Jewish God of the Old Testament is clear from the broader narrative of Acts. But at no point is he announcing this God apart from his revelation through the resurrected man.

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[467]Dunn 1996:231.

[468]Dunn 1996:231.

[469]Dunn 1996:236.

Consequently, and turning to the nature of the kerygma in Gentile contexts in Acts, the speech in Athens suggests that the resurrection of Jesus is not an additional complementary part of the message preached to the Gentiles, but the very means by which the nature of the true God is proclaimed to the nations. This mitigates claims that the proclamation of the gospel to the gentiles in Acts necessitates first the proclamation of the Jewish God and monotheism and that the Old Testament and the synagogue alone can prepare for the gospel as Jervell claims. Rather, Luke has crafted a speech in which the central Christian message is proclaimed to an audience without any Jewish background. Not only so, but even more importantly, an understanding of the issues and debates in Greek philosophy and religion in early Post-Hellenistic times shows that Luke presents the central Christian message as a new teaching about what were also Greek concerns and Greek debated questions: the means of averting divine hostility and having peace with the gods, and the affirmation of the goodness and justice of the gods and their reward of the good, despite the presence of evil and injustice in the world.

6.4.   The Christian movement, Graeco-Roman culture and the purpose of Acts

In conclusion, a final word must be said about the way this project contributes to the scholarly discussion on Luke's attitude towards Graeco-Roman culture and his purposes in composing his double-work. As highlighted in the introduction, Acts 17 has been a key text to assess those perennial questions in Lukan scholarship and has been used to support very different theses concerning the attitude of the Christian movement towards Graeco-Roman culture in Acts. It would be inappropriate to make general claims about Acts based solely on the analyse of this pericope, but two points can be made here to guide further research.

First, as highlighted in the preceding section, the present project demonstrates the problems with Jervell's thesis, namely that the Areopagus speech represents the 'no' of the church to *ausserjüdisches Heidentum*. This project thus corroborates the assessment of many who have criticized Jervell for underestimating the importance of the mission to the Gentiles in Luke's literary project.[470] In particular, it suggests that the 'good news' of the resurrection of Jesus was announced to an audience of Gentiles *who had no connection with Judaism and were steeped in paganism,* as an answer to their apparent fear of the gods and concern to maintain peace with them. Not only so, but although the speech assumes an OT worldview, the message makes little appeal to specific Jewish knowledge and rather builds upon Greek philosophical commonplaces about piety and the nature of a creator god endorsed by some philosophers.

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[470]Cf. Butticaz 2011:15.

On the other hand, the reading suggested by this project also challenges the view that Luke depicts the Christian movement and message as peacefully accommodationist of Graeco-Roman culture. In fact, the interpretation suggested in this project argues that the speech is not only a critique of idolatry or polytheism, but a call to repentance from unrighteousness to all because human beings are meant to be an image God. It thus articulates a much more fundamental criticism than the question of the materiality of divine representations, and includes the philosophers in its criticism. What Acts 17 calls for is more than the removal of idols, something which some philosophers might well have accommodated, but a repentance and new vision of God and divine-likeness.

Finally, this project raises questions for the claim that the Areopagus speech illustrates Luke's apologetic purposes, because it seeks to 'defend' or 'legitimate' the Christian message and movement by showing that it shares much common ground with the best of Greek philosophy.[471] Indeed, as highlighted in the discussion of the meaning of the hellenization of the speech, not only do the Athenians of his narrative not perceive Paul to bring a teaching congenial to their own, but the historical background shows that the commonplaces invoked by the speech would not have been understood as significant rapprochement. Likewise, it is unlikely that the speech aims to convince the philosophers of inconsistency with their own beliefs because they still engage in the Graeco-Roman cult, since both the Epicureans and the Stoics had rationales for doing so.

Most importantly, the speech does actually present something *new* and hardly believable which challenges common philosophical conceptions, even if it proceeds within some accepted Greek common places. This is confirmed by the mockery of part of the Greeks at the end of the speech. All those elements suggest that the speech is not concerned with legitimacy, nor with linking its message with the Greek worldview to defend it, but with the proclamation of a *novum* which, while in agreement with several Greek common places and presented as an answer to a Greek concern, departs from, and challenges, both Stoic and Epicurean teaching in important ways. Luke thus rather presents the Christian kerygma as a rival to the Stoic and Epicurean teaching on the question of piety.

It is of course not possible to conclude from this very limited study that Luke is not concerned with apologetic purposes towards the Graeco-Roman world in his work. And again, the word 'apologetic' can be understood along different lines, and need not be incompatible with, for example, a proselytic endeavour.[472] But it certainly constitutes a warning against too quickly interpreting any kind of 'hellenization' or use of 'Greek' motifs as signs of an apologetic endeavour.[473] It is still a widespread assumption in Acts scholarship that the early Christians would have felt the need to

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[471]Malherbe 1989:152; Jipp 2012.

[472]On this subject, cf. Carleton Paget 2010: esp. 164.

[473]See, for example, Aitken (2004:339) who criticizes Hengel's book because it still presumes that 'a writer in Greek would have apologetic purposes whether addressing Jews or Greeks,' and not allowing 'for other possible explanations.'

respond defensively to the majority culture or legitimate itself with respect to, or through the script of, this majority culture.[474] In the case of the pericope in Athens, however, while Luke presents the Christian message as a rival to Greek philosophical traditions and is concerned to convince its Greek audience by using common Hellenistic terminology and arguments, the specific nature of the argumentation is dictated by the subject and the audience at hand rather than by a concern for legitimacy or defensive apologetic.

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[474]E.g., Malherbe 1989.

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