Introduction

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(i) Themes and Methodologies

Around the mid-thirteenth century, in the short-lived empire of Nicaea, the enlightened prince and philosopher Theodore II Laskaris was confronted with the dreadful death of his wife Elena. The period of mourning gave rise to his *Moral Pieces* (*Ἐπιτομαὶ ἠθικαί*), a collection of twelve essays of a profoundly ethical character, focusing on the instability of human fate as opposed to the durability of genuine virtue. What marks the collection as a whole is the overarching despondency at the loss of Elena, which leads to the discussion of broader concerns about human existence, happiness and morality. While placing the characteristics of human soul and nature into a Christian context (e.g. essay 1), Theodore is also keen to adopt Platonic and Aristotelian understandings of the soul and intellect, bringing them into alignment with his emphasis on spirituality addressed in his account. But it is perhaps the peculiar style of his moralism that stands out in passages such as the following:

> Large is the sea of life and hard to cross, because the man who powerlessly sails on it is utterly unable to find harbor. For he is constantly disturbed by the motion of the winds. According to Homer, "mortals are weaker than everything," (*Od.* 8.169; 18.130) because they have in themselves continuous misfortunes. For they are in every way weaker than everything, because everything in humankind has come to be nothing at all. For as everything in humankind is turned upside down and altered, the inconstancy of the affairs of life becomes evident, because also the properties of the soul, being changed, depart from their prior state and do not remember anything they cherished. For food, luxury, comfort, servants, honor, pomp, and everything else mortal nature is accustomed to value are of no benefit and use; none of them is for the sake of virtue and edification. The soul hardens and enjoys none of these things since they have no permanence. For they disappear with time and are considered to be nothing on account of fortune, because when they pass away unexpectedly, they bring sorrow rather than

> joy. Wretched nature, what will you do? You have been allotted a mixed composition beyond comprehension, you have earned a noble name in that you are called rational. You abound in rational thoughts and have such a divine spirit, but lo and behold, you are unluckier even than senseless objects when you incur these horrible corruptions caused by time. (*Moral Pieces*, *Essay* 2, 61–89; ed. and trans. Angelov 256)

In stressing the transience of human existence in the light of unpredictable changes in human affairs, Theodore insists on the vanity of life, relating it to what he considers a cluster of useless things: food, luxury, comfort, servants, honour, pomp. None of these, he exclaims, 'is for the sake of virtue and edification'. The philosophical principle behind this is the Stoic theory of the 'indifferents', that is, external goods that have no bearing on individual happiness, which was embraced by early Christian thinkers partly in an attempt to dissociate social class from religiosity, thereby broadening participation in Christianity. By describing and problematising this philosophical theory and its moral implications, Theodore subtly urges his readers to value virtue over externals. In addition, his professed interest in affectivity and in emotions help enhance the impact of Theodore's moral advice on the reader: in this case, the categorical distinction between distress and joy (λυποῦσι μᾶλλον ἢ τέρπουσι, 2, 83) serves to show how the moral agent is expected to feel when experiencing a tragic reversal of fate. Elsewhere (4, 170–9), Theodore taps into the role of human rationality in prevailing over non-rational impulses and desires, echoing the well-known chariot allegory from the *Phaedrus* (246a–254e); yet, he intertwines its essentials with the image of the horse and the mule from Psalms 31:9, in effect Christianising pagan moral psychology.

On other occasions in this collection, moral exhortation is communicated more explicitly, through direct injunctions as to what courses of behaviour are to be avoided so that virtue can be favoured:

> To be honored on account of virtue with the happy lot of honoring the parts of honor is nothing but a benefaction of God. For this reason everyone ought to embrace virtue (Δεῖ γοῦν ἅπαντας διαταῦτα ἀσπάζεσθαι ἀρετήν). **For what is everything else? Temporary pleasure, weakness of reason, effeminacy of the soul, aberration of the intellect, instigation of evil, invitation of pain, continuous sorrow, lamentation about the final moments, groans of the companions, even if these are to no avail, thoughts of many hearts, coals glowing like an echo's diminishing sound, ill-timed repentance, message of misfortune.** The story of sorrow is terrible for those who tell it and is totally unspeakable for those who hear it. Everything is lament, everything is melody resounding with ululation. Jeremiah lamented and Jesus wept and prayed for things that without

> exception are caused by erring human nature. (*Moral Pieces*, *Essay* 5, 206–23; ed. and trans. Angelov 260)

In the above passage, virtue is defined through a vivid list of forms of conduct contradictory to virtue (in bold), so that, again the fallacious character of life is described in the by now familiar, pessimistic terms of despair and lamentation.

This brief case-study, though far from being exhaustive or of universal application, brings out a number of themes and dichotomies central to studies on the reception of Greek ethics in individual thinkers as well as across individual genres, groups of authors or distinct periods. One theme has to do with the (re)definition of virtue and happiness, as well as their connection with one another: do happiness and virtue (always) overlap? In the case of Theodore Laskaris' *Moral Pieces* specifically, one may well wonder whether the author's protracted sorrow and hopelessness in effect preclude him from any virtuous performance, although a clear answer to that is never given in the text, leaving other possibilities open. Another theme relates to the blending of patristic thought and Greek moral philosophy, which is studied in several chapters of this volume. Closely linked to that is the distinction between reason and the passions omnipresent in a good number of moral discussions, which in turn would be a suitable subject for more sustained future research into affective scripts and emotional discourse, particularly, in late-antique and Byzantine works on ethics. A similar methodological direction pertains to the promotion of the historic reception of ancient ethical texts, such as Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, through examination of their cultural, social, religious and pedagogical transformation in later settings and authors. This theme is extensively dealt with in the chapters that follow. Last but not least, a further strand of discussion throughout this book concerns the different ways moral advice is passed on to different audiences and the varying modes of exposition depending on the genre and context of delivery.

(ii) Textual Sources on Ethics

Despite the rich source material dealing with ethics, morality and happiness in late antiquity and Byzantium, there has been as yet no systematic or comprehensive attempt to explore the resourceful appropriation of Greek ethical views by later authors.[1] This is partly due to the way the treatment

[1] There are brief overviews covering long periods which are naturally selective, for example, Zografidis (2011a) or Karamanolis (2013: 214–36), and Cardman (2008) with further references. There are also

of moral ideas from the past has been dispersed over different genres, ranging from philosophy, hagiography, biography and epistolography (especially letters of consolation) to 'mirrors of princes' and rhetorical exercises focusing on character emulation and assessment of morals. Theological literature, in particular, merits special attention as a genre, since, from the early Church Fathers onwards, traditional moral principles from Greek philosophy became embedded in a Christian context to consolidate human identity as an image of God, for example, by encouraging people to practise self-restraint, love and justice. The moral underpinnings of Greek patristic thought are prevalent, for example, in Paul's *Epistles*, the orations of John Chrysostom or many ascetic works by different authors, for example, Evagrius Ponticus, John Climacus, whereas Origen, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa were perhaps more directly open to accepting the usefulness of pagan ethics for the purposes of spiritual excellence.

Moving on to late antiquity, there is evidence suggesting that the educational agenda of the period upheld the study of ethics as a preparatory stage in the formal learning process with a cathartic function prior to the student's engagement with logic, although it is still debatable whether ethics actually formed a distinct part of the curriculum or indeed a rigid philosophical system at this stage. This is not to say, however, that the Platonist philosophers of late antiquity had no engagement with or interest in moral philosophy and practical ethics. Recent work has been illuminating in offering, for instance, fascinating material from Plotinus' ethics and its interaction with Platonic and Aristotelian moral philosophy in the context of the *Enneads*.[2] Other late-antique sources such as Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*, Iamblichus' *Pythagorean Life*, Marinus' *Life of Proclus* (also known as *On Happiness*) or Damascius' *Life of Isidore* promote imitable lifestyles by being especially concerned with different types of virtue, thus providing strong evidence of contemporary interest in the morally good life (Simplicius' Commentary on Epictetus' *Handbook* is further testimony to that).

Another important period displaying philosophical engagement with ethics is surely the twelfth century when, with the exegetical activity of Eustratius of Nicaea and Michael of Ephesus, the disciplinary and

individual studies on particular chronological periods, philosophical areas or thematic strands, for example, Thorsteinsson (2010), Barber and Jenkins (2009), Newhauser (2005), Ierodiakonou (2004), Arabatzis (1998).

[2] O'Meara (2017); cf. Smith (1999). Plotinus' ethics has become a topic of heightened interest in recent literature: for example, Dillon (1996), Remes (2006), Gerson (2013).

scholastic impact of ethics seems to have been given greater substance. The same holds true for the later Byzantine period, when George Pachymeres' paraphrase of and his commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, produced for didactic purposes, attest to the ancient work's inclusion in the scholarly curriculum. In much the same Comnenian context in which Eustratius and Michael operated, the widespread circulation of the anonymous *Didactic Admonitions* (commonly known as *Spaneas*) points to a concern for morally regulated individual and social behaviour pertaining to daily affairs, thus reflecting the application of normative ethics beyond didactic commitments or the eschatological and doctrinal requirements of religious ethics seen above. The same preoccupation with secular morality emerges with some variations in works of the later Byzantine period such as Laskaris' work on *Moral Pieces* alongside Theodore Metochites' (1279–1332) oration *On Morals or Concerning Education*, Nikephoros Blemmydes' (1197–1272) *Discourse on Virtue*, Joseph the Philosopher's (ca. 1260–ca.1330) *On Virtue*, Barlaam's (ca. 1290–1348) *Ethics according to the Stoics*, Manuel II Palaiologos' (1350–1425) *Seven Ethico-Political Orations*, John Chortasmenos' *Moral Precepts* (1370–1431) or Georgius Gemistus Pletho's (ca. 1355–1452) *On Virtues*. In various forms and employed with various objectives, such themes as assimilation to God, the superiority of the contemplative life in achieving happiness, or habituation as underpinning virtuous actions are central to the moral debates in these texts.

(iii) Overview of Contributions

This volume divides into two parts, with the chapters in each arranged chronologically. Part I focuses on themes pertaining to ethics across the late-antique and Byzantine period, covering specific timespans in each case. To start with, in Chapter 1, David Bradshaw explores sexual difference and its moral implications in the Greek Fathers and their sources. The transformation of the ancient world from paganism to Christianity brought with it not only a new set of ethical injunctions, but a new 'moral cosmology' – that is, a new way of conceiving of humanity in relation to God and the cosmos. One important element of such a moral cosmology is the distinction between the sexes. Why did God create humanity in two sexes, and what is the ultimate meaning of one's sexual identity? The thinking of the Greek Fathers on this subject was heavily indebted to Greek philosophy, especially Plato. For Plato, the soul is fundamentally sexless and acquires sexual identity only upon embodiment.

Although Christians (with the exception of Origen) generally rejected the pre-existence of the soul, they accepted the premise that the soul itself is intrinsically sexless. Many carried this further to the conclusion that in the afterlife, there will be a gradual move away from our current sexual condition to a higher, asexual form of existence. Bradshaw traces the development of such views from Plato through Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor. He further argues that on this point, Christian authors accepted the pagan philosophical inheritance rather too uncritically and that a careful consideration of their rejection of metempsychosis suggests a very different view.

In Chapter 2, Riccardo Chiaradonna examines the connection between the ethical views of early Neoplatonist philosophers (Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus) and their metaphysical doctrines concerning the hierarchy of being. In section 1, he argues that Plotinus focuses on virtues within the framework of a discussion about how the embodied soul can revert to the intelligible god (*Enn.* 1.2(19)). According to Plotinus, the intelligible god has no virtues: there are paradigms of virtues in the Intellect, but these are not the virtues themselves. This is consistent with Plotinus' view that different levels in the hierarchy of being are heterogeneous and do not share the same properties. Plotinus' approach makes the status of political virtues problematic. Sections 2 and 3 focus on Porphyry and Iamblichus respectively. Their arrangements of the levels of virtues are connected to their accounts of the hierarchy of being, which are different from both that of Plotinus and from each other. Porphyry's account in *Sent.* 32 is based on the idea that the cause pre-contains what depends on it (hence Porphyry's emphasis on paradigmatic virtues). Iamblichus' account seems to rely on his view that different levels in the hierarchy are connected via analogy.

Next comes Sara Ahbel-Rappe's chapter (Chapter 3), which offers a discussion of mind training in Neoplatonic contemplative ethics. Ahbel-Rappe shows how the contemplative ethics of Neoplatonism repurposes classical and Hellenistic ethics, advancing a new distinction between practical and theoretical wisdom. The classical and Hellenistic contrast between the *bios praktikos* and its attendant virtue *phronesis* and the *bios theoretikos* together with its attendant virtue *sophia* informs half a millennium or more of ethical thinking. In the discourse surrounding the competing value of these ethical registers, the practical life and the contemplative life, both ancient philosophers and their exegetes approach the theoretical life with trepidation, as if some apology is needed for the practical limits of contemplative ethics. But, Ahbel-Rappe argues, any such anxiety as to how the life of *theoria* can be valorised from the point of view

of ordinary virtue is unnecessary when it comes to understanding the ethics of Plotinus and of Porphyry, at least in the *Enneads* and in the *Sententiae*. There is an *important* place for the practical life, if by *practical* we understand the development of the capacity for contemplation. As such, the practical side of this ethics is a form of mind training, or even an ethics of concentration. Its complement, wisdom, theoretical virtue or *sophia*, consists in insight or knowledge of the nature of the real, together with realisation of the true self of the practitioner.

In Chapter 4, John F. Finamore discusses ethics, virtue and theurgy in late-Neoplatonic philosophy, arguing in favour of an Iamblichean and Neoplatonic theory of ethics. By examining the seven grades of virtue recognised by Iamblichus, Finamore shows that a specific kind of cognition or knowledge is associated with each grade. The hierarchy of kinds of knowledge is parallel not only to the grades of virtue but also to the various stages of the soul's theurgical ascent. The higher we ascend in the ritual, the better and more secure the knowledge we possess. Examining and interpreting a series of passages in Book V of the *De mysteriis*, Finamore argues that Iamblichus associates various classes of humanity with the grades of virtue and the kinds of knowledge that they possess. Putting these various criteria together, Finamore shows that Iamblichus believed that all humanity at all levels has a kind of virtue and that the philosopher-theurgists themselves had a duty to descend with their higher knowledge and work for the benefit of all humanity.

Robbert M. van den Berg's chapter (Chapter 5) explores the views of Neoplatonic commentators (e.g. Proclus and the anonymous *Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*) on the relation between Plato's ethical philosophy and the literary format of the Platonic dialogue. It focuses, in particular, on the role of visualisation in the process of moral education. The Neoplatonists praise Plato's dialogues for their 'vividness' (*enargeia*). They hold that the vivid depiction of good characters (e.g. Socrates) promotes imitation of similar behaviour, whereas the equally vivid depiction of bad characters (e.g. the ambitious Alcibiades) invites critical self-examination. The Neoplatonists develop their view in part in response to the Stoics, who had argued that moral education should be restricted to the teaching of bare moral rules. The difference between the Stoic and Platonic views on the importance of literature in moral education can be explained by their differing views on the constitution of the human soul. Whereas (most) Stoics hold that the entire soul is rational, the Platonic tradition acknowledges the non-rational aspect of the human soul and holds that moral education should address both the rational and the non-rational.

Van den Berg also shows that modern psychological research corroborates the Platonic position on the human soul and the need for (literary) examples in moral education.

In Chapter 6, Benjamin Blosser negotiates the reception of Greek Ethics in Christian monastic writings. Christian monastic literature – monastic rules, lives of monastic saints, collections of monastic sayings and tractates of monastic spirituality – represents a unique genre within late-antique and Byzantine literature. Scholars have debated for centuries about the diverse influences which shaped such texts, but something of a consensus has emerged that, notwithstanding the obvious and predominant influence of the Bible, these texts have also been influenced by the ethical reflections of Greek philosophy. It is impossible to deny the obvious parallels between the insights of Greek philosophers – in particular, the Neoplatonists and Stoics – and Christian monastic literature. On the one hand, one finds in this literature a modified soul–body dualism, the positing of a transcendent, otherworldly finality of human existence, a dynamism which seeks to bring unification out of diversity, and an appreciation for a well-ordered society which sublimates individual ambition to the common good, all of which has close analogues in Neoplatonism. On the other hand, one also finds a mandate to live in a way that is described as 'in accordance with reason' or 'self-sufficiently', in which passions are subdued or overcome, all of which accords closely with Stoicism. Blosser argues that, although Christian monastic writers rarely had direct access to Greek philosophical texts, they had nonetheless absorbed the collective wisdom of these texts as filtered through the Hellenistic Christianity of their day, many of whose chief intellectuals – such as Clement and Origen of Alexandria – had already managed a creative fusion of Greek wisdom with the Christian Gospel.

Chapter 7 by Demetrios Harper locates and elucidates the philosophical precedents and mechanisms in late-antique and Byzantine Christian thought that inform the tension between the rigorous affirmation of autonomous moral determination, on the one hand, and the self-effacing quality of ecclesiastical and monastic life, on the other. Though this is expressed with some variations and terminological inconsistency, the majority of Christian writers affirm some version of 'free will' and universally attribute the capacity for moral development to all humankind, developing and altering paradigms from the *mélange* of philosophical concepts present in Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism. No less prominent, however, is the assertion – made both tacitly and explicitly – that private moral judgment and individual conscience are unreliable. Each

human being not only requires a pedagogical process for proper moral development but also depends upon the presence and guidance of a heteronomous 'other', whether human or divine. Harper accordingly demonstrates that, while both late-antique and Byzantine Christians considered free will and moral determination an inextricable aspect of moral psychology, they did not have the same understanding of autonomy as that which emerged so forcefully in the Enlightenment and thereafter.

The last chapter in this section (Chapter 8) is by Leonora Neville. Her analysis focuses on ethical training in Byzantium by examining texts from the tenth to twelfth centuries, including Theophanes Continuatus and works by Peter of Argos, Theodore of Nicaea, John Tzetzes and Constantine Manasses, while briefly discussing connections to works on ethical practice by Plutarch and Athanasius of Alexandria. Studies of hymnography, elite rhetoric and gender have displayed the central role of imitating past models in the cultivation of ethical habits and construction of the self in Byzantium. People in the Byzantine period both refined and displayed their character by patterning their emotions and responses on ancient and biblical models. Numerous historical texts presented classical figures as ethical examples to a medieval audience primed to shun or imitate those behaviours. The elite rhetorical habit of likening subjects to great characters of classical antiquity is explored in Neville's chapter as but one aspect of a larger set of cultural practices that aimed at learning ethical behaviour through the imitation of valorised models.

Part II of this book explores prominent ethical views in a specific author or authors in context. Byron MacDougall (Chapter 9) investigates the reception of classical ethical philosophy in the fourth-century Cappadocian Church Father Gregory of Nazianzus by focusing on the first of his five *Theological Orations* (*Or.* 27). An Athenian-trained rhetorician, who became the most widely studied and imitated author in Byzantium, Gregory weaves together various strands from ancient ethical discourse in order to set out the moral and cultural prerequisites for performing theology. MacDougall shows that Gregory's construction of the ideal theologian reflects late-antique discussions about the proper exegesis of texts, the moral character expected of teachers and students, and the policing of discourse. Finally, MacDougall argues that Gregory distinguishes the appropriate performance of theology from theology performed *simpliciter* through a set of qualifications that reflect a recognisably Aristotelian framework, one that can be traced back to the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

In the next chapter (Chapter 10), Riin Sirkel discusses Porphyry's account of the just treatment of non-human animals in his treatise *On Abstinence from Killing Animals*. Sirkel argues that in responding to the Stoic argument that justice extends only to rational beings and leaves out non-rational animals, Porphyry introduces a number of considerations to show that animals are not entirely deprived of reason. It is usually assumed that Porphyry thereby commits himself to the view that animals are rational, thus breaking with the tradition of treating rationality as distinctively human. This assumption has been recently challenged by G. Fay Edwards, who argues that Porphyry neither believes that animals are rational nor that justice extends only to rational beings, but that he is merely trying to trap the Stoics into admitting that animals are rational and for this reason recipients of justice. Sirkel shows that Porphyry ascribes rationality to animals, although he does not think that this is the reason they should be treated justly. Central to her interpretation is Porphyry's claim that rationality admits of degrees, which allows him to ascribe to animals a certain level of rationality without compromising his Platonic ideals.

The Comnenian period (eleventh–twelfth centuries) has a central place in the discussions of ethics in this volume. This is the time when Eustratius of Nicaea and Michael of Ephesus produced sophisticated commentaries on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and so the next two chapters explore the fruits of their labours. Chapter 11 by Michele Trizio examines the extent to which Eustratius is indebted to the ancient commentary tradition and at the same time how he departed from the earlier model in order to answer contemporary questions about meaning, some of which had a bearing on morality and ethics. In doing so, Trizio considers in detail Eustratius' hermeneutics and textual approach, its dependence upon the ancient model, and the novelties in his approach to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. He argues that Eustratius contributed fundamentally to the formation of a specifically Byzantine commentary tradition by sometimes criticising Aristotle or introducing some motifs that were unrelated to Aristotle's moral philosophy. Finally, this chapter also investigates the historical circumstances of Eustratius' career as a commentator and highlights how Eustratius' literary and philosophical production reflects his patron Anna Comnena as a learned woman who devoted the second part of her life to moral philosophy. Chapter 12 by Péter Lautner turns the spotlight on Michael of Ephesus and explores the relationship of civic happiness to happiness in contemplation. The aim of the chapter is twofold. First, it seeks to show that the relationship between the two kinds of happiness requires that civic happiness, and thus civic virtues,