Dedicated to
my teacher Seth Benardete
Acknowledgments

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Vishwa Adluri
### Abbreviations

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A &amp; A</td>
<td>Antike und Abendland: Beiträge zum Verständnis der Griechen und Römer und ihres Nachlebens</td>
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<tr>
<td>AC</td>
<td>L’Antiquité Classique</td>
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<tr>
<td>AE</td>
<td>Archaiologike Ephemeris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGPh</td>
<td>Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie</td>
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<tr>
<td>AION (filol)</td>
<td>Annali dell’Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli, Dipartimento di Studi del Mondo classico e del Mediterraneo antico, Sezione filologico-letteraria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AJPh</td>
<td>American Journal of Philology</td>
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<tr>
<td>AncPhil</td>
<td>Ancient Philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOF</td>
<td>Archiv für Orientforschung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS</td>
<td>Anatolian Studies: Journal of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCH</td>
<td>Bulletin de correspondance hellénique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BICS</td>
<td>Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies of the University of London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>Civiltà classica e cristiana</td>
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<tr>
<td>CFC(G)</td>
<td>Cuadernos de filología clásica (Estudios griegos e indoeuropeos)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CJ</td>
<td>The Classical Journal</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPh</td>
<td>Classical Philology</td>
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<td>CQ</td>
<td>Classical Quarterly</td>
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<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>Classical Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>GRBS</td>
<td>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</td>
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<td>HSCP</td>
<td>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jahrb. f. class. Phil.</td>
<td>Jahrbücher für classische Philologie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journ. of Cuneif. Studies</td>
<td>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>JHS</td>
<td>Journal of Hellenic Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>MH</td>
<td>Museum Helveticum: revue suisse pour l’étude de l’Antiquité classique</td>
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<tr>
<td>OSAPh</td>
<td>Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy</td>
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<tr>
<td>PP</td>
<td>La Parola del passato: rivista di studi antichi</td>
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<tr>
<td>QUCC</td>
<td>Quaderni urbinati di cultura classica</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<tr>
<td>REG</td>
<td>Revue des études grecques</td>
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<td>RA</td>
<td>Revue archéologique</td>
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<tr>
<td>RhM</td>
<td>Rheinisches Museum</td>
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<tr>
<td>RMeta</td>
<td>Review of Metaphysics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPhA</td>
<td>Revue de philosophie ancienne</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIFC</td>
<td>Studi italiani di filologia classica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMSR</td>
<td>Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAPhA</td>
<td>Transactions of the American Philological Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAPhS</td>
<td>Transactions of the American Philosophical Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZPE</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</td>
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I. Philosophy and Theology

In 1959 Gregory Vlastos published an article titled “Theology and Philosophy in Early Greek Thought.”¹ In it he wrote, “When one reads the pre-Socratics with open mind and sensitive ear one cannot help being struck by the religious note in much of what they say. Few words occur more frequently in their fragments than the term ‘god’. In Parmenides and Empedocles the whole doctrine of Being and Nature is put forth as religious revelation.”² Vlastos was arguing against Burnet, who in his Early Greek Philosophy had proposed that the word “θεός” in the writings of the Ionian philosophers ought not mislead us as to the secular nature of their work. Burnet argued that “there had been a complete break with Aegean religion” by the time of the φιλόσοφοι and hence declared forthrightly: “It is therefore quite wrong to look for the origins of Ionian science in mythological ideas of any kind.”³

Contra Burnet, Vlastos argued that the Presocratics believed that their concept of nature found in it “not only the principles of physical explanation, but also the key to the right ordering of human life and the answer to the problem of destiny. They began with the faith that nature itself was animated by that Wisdom and Justice which the most enlightened conscience of their race had imputed to Zeus. So long as this faith lived they could transfer to nature the reverence hitherto reserved for Zeus and could therefore call nature ‘god’ without indulging in an empty figure of speech.”⁴

¹ Gregory Vlastos, “Theology and Philosophy in Early Greek Thought,” The Philosophical Quarterly 2.7 (1952): 97–123.
² Ibid., 97.
³ John Burnet, Early Greek Philosophy (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892 [with successive reprints]), 13.
⁴ Vlastos 1952, 100.
Vlastos’ investigations into the nature and meaning of the Greeks’ use of terms such as “σωφρόν” or “σολογία” brought to light a fundamental problem, and a puzzle. When contemporary scholars since modernity have rejected Greek eschatological concerns as a significant part of their philosophy, they were often doing so as a reaction against their own experience of Christianity. Nietzsche famously claimed Christianity was nothing but “Platonism for the masses.” Much of his rejection of Plato or Platonism stems from this view. Thus, while in many ways he saw himself as committed to a recovery and revival of the Greeks, his reading of Plato remained colored by his polemics against Christianity. Likewise, one could show of a number of historically influential interpretations of Plato in contemporary thought (e.g., Heidegger or other “post-metaphysical” thinkers) that their views on ancient philosophy are rooted in theological debates implicit to Christianity.5

The problem becomes especially acute when speaking of Greek views of “salvation,” because our tendency is immediately to interpret “salvation” on analogy with Christian ideas of the afterlife and of heaven, and hence to reject Greek eschatology. Burnet’s resistance toward the idea that Ionian science might still have something in common with archaic religion is a paradigmatic example of how scholarship often projected its need for a strictly scientific worldview onto antiquity.6 The rejection of Platonic thought as espousing a “two-world theory” is another instance of how our need to affirm certain ideas, namely, our existence here and now,7 has shaped our reception of the ancients. But what if the two conceptions, i.e., Christian and Greek eschatology, had only the name in common? What if Greek “salvation” bespoke a radically different experience than the one we, influenced by two millennia of Christian upbringing, have come to expect and to associate with the term? The problem when speaking of “philosophy and salvation in Greek religion” is thus not simply recognizing that salvation is a necessary component of Greek philosophy, one we must grant as being


6 This view still persists; see, for example, Anthony Gottlieb’s popular survey The Dream of Reason: A History of Philosophy from the Greeks to the Renaissance (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000).

7 A concept Heidegger refers to as “Diesseitigkeit”; Schmitt traces this interest in an immanent account to Duns Scotus, see n. 11 below.
just as legitimate as Christian salvation. Rather, the problem is that the relationship of philosophy to salvation first needs to be posed as a question. What is the relation of philosophy to salvation?

Once we set aside our aversion to talking of “salvation” (which aversion I argue is itself a residue of our Christian inheritance), a rich field of inquiry opens up. Can and ought philosophy be at all concerned with eschatology? What role does salvation play within a philosophical theory? What are the ways, historically speaking, in which salvation has been conceived of? What are the preparatory techniques (e.g., ritual initiation, learning of secret formulae, carrying of tokens, etc.) considered efficacious in its achievement? Most importantly, to what extent were these cultic practices informed by philosophical models of Being or of the cosmos? These are some of the questions the present volume attempts to address.

As scholars we are now more aware of the issues involved in our reception of ancient authors. The emphasis on the situatedness of every interpretation in the hermeneutic theories of the past century has contributed significantly to an awareness of the problems with a naïve historicism. We have learnt also to become suspicious of an Enlightenment narrative of history. In the field of classics, for example, Walter Burkert’s seminal study of katabatic elements in Parmenidean and Pythagorean thought demonstrated that scholars were wrong to interpret the journey of the Parmenidean κοῦρος as an ascent to the light, allegedly a metaphor for his “Enlightenment” from ignorance to knowledge. Rather, Burkert advocated relating Parmenides’ journey to ritual descent, and hence to a feature of archaic religion. The work of Kingsley has also challenged the view that the presence of ritual and mythic elements in the philosophical traditions of late antiquity is evidence of degeneracy, allegedly due to “Orientalizing” influences, and of a fall away from the “rationalism” of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy. We now benefit from a wide range of theoretical approaches, including analytic, literary, aesthetic, and philological approaches. Careful studies

10 The analytic approach was established by Gregory Vlastos, and relies on applying the techniques of contemporary analytic philosophy to Plato’s dialogues. It is thus often opposed to a literary approach, which focuses more on dramatic
by Arbogast Schmitt and his students of the reception of Plato in late antiquity and modernity have alerted us to some of the problems with our contemporary reception.\textsuperscript{11} Even a cursory glance at Richard Kraut’s excellent companion to Plato shows how rich and multifaceted contemporary scholarship on Platonic philosophy is.\textsuperscript{12} And yet, in spite of significant recent work on the Orphic traditions\textsuperscript{13} and the Derveni papyrus,\textsuperscript{14} we are yet to thematize the relationship of philosophy to the eschatological/soteriological traditions of antiquity. How does the study of the Gold Leaves, for example, contribute to an understanding of ancient man’s views of soul and of its destiny? How do Presocratic cosmologies relate to their ethics? And how does the emergence of more formal philosophical accounts impact these older traditions?

context and literary motifs or references. Among contemporary representatives of the former are Julia Annas (see especially her studies of Plato) and Gail Fine (see her studies of Aristotle and on Aristotle’s relationship to Plato). The literary approach is most often identified with the work of Leo Strauss; Stanley Rosen may be considered a contemporary representative. Christopher Janaway and Stephen Halliwell are two scholars who have focused on Plato’s aesthetics. Strauss’ student Benardete advocated a literary reading with attention to philosophical detail. Other scholars such as Kenneth Sayre, who pays attention to both the quality of arguments and the dramatic context, or Debra Nails, who combines historical, biographical, and dramatic approaches, span different schools. The recently published Continuum Companion to Plato, ed. Gerald A. Press (London: Continuum, 2012) provides a good overview of the different theoretical approaches in contemporary scholarship.


Recent work by Edmonds\textsuperscript{15} and Graf/Johnston\textsuperscript{16} has contributed richly to our understanding of the Gold Leaves, small tablets inscribed with instructions for the initiate on what he must do in the Underworld to attain salvation. The researches of Primavesi, Janko and others have shown that Empedocles’ cosmology, once thought to be independent of his religious/purificatory concerns, is closely related to the latter: the key philosophical concern that holds these two together and articulates their relation is the concern with human salvation.\textsuperscript{17} We know from the researches of Riedweg that Plato systematically uses the language and structure of the mysteries in his dialogues.\textsuperscript{18} Two recent studies by Luc Brisson have shown how naïve it is to assume that Plato’s use of myths represents an accidental oversight, a sign of being unable to achieve sufficient conceptual clarity.\textsuperscript{19}

The purpose of the present volume, however, is both different and much more modest. It does not aim to propound a new approach to ancient texts. Nor does it claim to overcome the perspectives and prejudices of our contemporary reception. Rather, its object is to clarify the initial ground from which we might raise the question of the relationship of Greek religion to Greek philosophy, and to do so specifically with a view to seeing what might be gained for contemporary philosophy in terms of an ontology. If eschatology is no longer approached from the perspective of Revelation, but from the perspective of the individual and his ultimate concern, how must it now be thought? Thus,

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotesize
18 Christoph Riedweg, \textit{Mysterienterminologie bei Platon, Philon und Clemens von Alexandrien} (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1987).
\end{footnotesize}
the task as I see it is to set aside a theological frame of reference, and to approach the question of salvation from the perspective of what we might call a “philosophical soteriology.” This tradition combines initiatory ritual and near-death experience, myth and mantic insight with rational, philosophical inquiry—that is to say, with investigations into cosmology, epistemology, and ethics. In contrast to contemporary Western philosophy, it does not separate theory from praxis, and its goal is not purely propositional knowledge. Rather, it aims to bring about a philosophical transformation, leading the initiate from his mortal existence to immortal Being: “I, in your eyes a deathless god, no longer mortal, go among all,” declares Empedocles (frag. B112).20 I would like to clarify this task in two stages: first, I will develop a few key terms such as philosophy, theology, philology, religion, God, salvation, etc. below, and then I will discuss what I consider the key elements of philosophical soteriology.

II. Salvation for the Philosopher

Philosophy for us “moderns” has taken on the dimensions of an abstract conceptual science. It is systematic thinking, based on arguments, and an inquiry undertaken for its own sake. Although we do make space for its application (e.g., in political science, political theory, ethics, or aesthetics), in the main philosophy remains an abstract and theoretical activity for us. But this definition of philosophy leaves out a small but nonetheless vital area of ancient philosophy, i.e., the inquiry into what we might call man’s “ultimate concern.” Here, as I argued in my recent book, we find contemporary philosophy to be seriously lacking.21 We have displaced the task of positing ultimate referents from philosophy to theology or, where we find theology to be unsatisfying, to technology.22

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20 The text and translation follows Inwood, see The Poem of Empedocles: A Text and Translation with an Introduction (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 211.


22 I have analyzed technology as a form of metaphysics in my book on Parmenides (see previous note). Technology, by covering over φύσις and making us forget φύσις, appears as an antidote to both the fatal temporality of Becoming and to our mortality. But this antidote is merely a seduction.
But there is also a form of philosophical inquiry that is undertaken neither for the sake of constructing the ideal city nor for the sake of knowing God. This philosophy begins with the experience of being mortal, and is wholly addressed to its concerns. In ancient thought, there is no notion of philosophy as an activity undertaken for its own sake. Philosophy is always tied to the mortal condition, and pursued as a cure for it: “I am afraid that other people do not realize that the one aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner is to practice for dying and death,” Socrates tells Ceber and Simias in the Phaedo (64a). The philosopher lives and sleeps only with his body in the city (Theaet. 173e), and his entire effort is aimed at making an escape, which means to become “as like God as possible” (176b).

Likewise, in any inquiry into Greek notions of salvation, we must begin by setting apart philosophy from theology. Walter Burkert in his “Platon oder Pythagoras? Zum Ursprung des Wortes ‘Philosophie’” remarks that “the claim of the prophet and the consciousness of the limit [Grenzbewuβtsein] of the philosopher mutually exclude each other.” Fragments such as B112 attest to theories of self-transformation, of becoming immortal, probably through the practice of purifications. And yet, here too the starting point is the mortal condition: Empedocles describes himself as an exile and a wanderer, thrust out of his heavenly home and longing to return. The longing for “salvation” expressed herein is very different from theology as we know it; its prop-

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23 Even Aristotle, who would seem to be an exception to this rule (cf. Met. A.2 982a5 – 983a10), would not accept the contemporary view of philosophy as an activity performed for its own sake. In Aristotle, philosophy is pursued because it is productive of eidos, and because it enables man to become as like the immortals as possible insofar as this is possible for him qua mortal man (see EN K.7 – 9).

24 I am aware of how strange this must sound, since in ancient thought there was no terminological distinction between “philosophy” and what we might call “theology.” Aristotle calls “θεολογία” “πρώτη φιλοσοφία” (“first philosophy”). What I mean, of course, is that we must set apart philosophy from dogmatic notions of God, of salvation, and of the doctrine of salvation.


26 Ibid., 177.

27 As does the Theaetetus passage cited above. But the goal of διστασις θεω does not refer to becoming like the God revealed in Revelation but “just and pious, with understanding.” The means of this “becoming like” is not faith, but the pursuit of rational inquiry and self-knowledge.
er sphere appears to be what I have elsewhere called a philosophy of “mortal singularity.”

The term “theology” is not foreign to the Greeks. Plato in the Republic uses “θεολογία” (Rep. 379a), and Werner Jaeger considers it to have been coined by him. But as Vlastos points out, the word is used in a rather disparaging sense; it is “introduced by Adeimantus (not Socrates) as a variant for ‘tales about the gods’. The casualness with which [it] is used here and in Laws X ... suggests that it was in common use at the time.” Even if we accept Jaeger’s suggestion, the word does not seem to acquire terminological significance until Aristotle, who speaks of θεολογική φιλοσοφία or έπιστήμη, and identifies this science with “first philosophy” (τρώτη φιλοσοφία, Met. A.1 and E.1). Even then, the notion of what Aristotle means is contested. While at times his first philosophy is identified with the science that studies Being qua Being, this is still different from the dogmatic discipline that studies a summum ens. While there are unmistakable parallels at times, this is due to the fact that later Christian theologians, above all Aquinas, drew heavily on Aristotle’s conceptual vocabulary, not because Aristotle himself entertained notions similar to that of the Christian monotheistic God. To speak of Greek theological salvation hence seems to be a far more problematic venture than to speak of Greek philosophical salvation.

For similar reasons, I find it preferable to eschew the use of “religious salvation.” Perhaps even more so than “theology,” no word is as anachronistic as “religion” in speaking of ancient beliefs about gods, soul, or the afterlife. Even though we commonly apply the word “religion” as a collective term for all forms of belief about the soul or afterlife, for worship of natural forces or divinities, and for every doctrine of divinity, the Latin “religio” bespeaks a specific experience. It cannot be translated unproblematically into Greek. Among terms that roughly correspond to the term in Greek, the following in

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28 See n. 21 above.
30 Vlastos 1952, 102, n.22.
particular have been suggested: θεὸν τιμή, νόμος, εὐσέβεια, οἶδώς, and even δεισιδαιμονία. The public and ritual aspects of Greek “religion” as we know are usually circumscribed with the terms λατρεία, ἔρωτας, and (rarely) θησικία. If Greek gods play a role in salvation it is almost always via the salvation seeker being initiated into the cult of a specific god or goddess, and not through the mere fact of identifying with a religion.\footnote{On the esoteric character of ancient religious practice, see the useful essays by Jan M. Bremmer, “Religious Secrets and Secrecy in Classical Greece,” and Walter Burkert, “Der geheime Reiz des Verborgenen. Antike Mysterienkulte,” both in Secrecy and Concealment in Ancient and Islamic History of Religions, ed. Hans G. Kippenberg and Guy G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 61–78 and 79–100.}

To us, conditioned by our historical experience, salvation has an intrinsic and necessary connection to God or at least to his intermediary in Christ, as is shown by the fact that the term “soteriology” or “doctrine of salvation” was for a long time used interchangeably with “Christology” (i.e., the doctrine of the person and the work of Christ).\footnote{For both terms (and the related “eschatology”), see the relevant entries in Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie, ed. Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer, vols. 1, 2, and 9 (Basel: Schwabe, 1971, 1972, and 1995).}

In 17th century academic theology, where the term “soteriology” originated,\footnote{Perhaps the earliest recorded usage (in the form σωτηρισμός) is to be found in Abraham Calov, Theologia positiva, per definitiones causas, affectiones, et distinctiones, Locos Theologicos universos, succinte justoque ordine proponens, seu compendium Systematis Theologicii (Wittebergae: Schröder, 1682).} it was used to refer to the doctrine of the savior and of salvation, but no strict terminological or systematic distinction could be made from “Christology,” since the term itself derived from the use of “σωτήρ” as a title for Jesus in the NT. But when speaking of Greek notions, it is best to set aside these expectations of a connection to God or his Son. The Greeks have no exact equivalent to our notion of “God” which draws on Abrahamic notions of divinity, and attempts to relate the Greek notions to ours (as has been attempted, for example by Étienne Gilson in his book God and Philosophy\footnote{Étienne Gilson, God and Philosophy, 2nd ed. (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2002).} are more often than
not problematic. This is not to deny that a rich synthesis between Greek philosophy and the Judaic faith took place in late antiquity and the Renaissance, above all, in the work of Augustine, producing much of what we today recognize as Christianity. But nonetheless, the question of Greek notions of salvation cannot be approached via a theological avenue. Newly arrived souls in the Underworld, to be sure, invoke Persephone, and Socrates in the *Phaedo* has Crito promise to sacrifice a cock to Asclepius (118a). And yet, both these practices must be seen against the background of the specific anthropology that gives rise to them. In Socrates’ case, the body is seen as a source of ills (*Phaedo* 66b–d, *Rep.* 611b–612a), and the salvation the god provides is liberation from the body (see also *Phaedrus* 246b–249a). This is very different from the bodily resurrection promised in the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed of AD 381.

Finally, what justification is there for speaking of “eschatology” in Greek thought? Like “soteriology,” this term too is attributed to the Lutheran theologian Abraham Calov in his *Systematis locorum theologorum* of 1677 where it denoted the final portion of Christian dogmatics dealing with death, resurrection, and the Last Judgment. We might argue that the use of both terms thus is an anachronism. Clearly, neither term can be used without the appropriate qualifications, since a doctrine of τὰ ἐσχάτα, the last things or the last days, has a very different meaning in the Christian context than it might have in the Greek context. At best, it might be used in the latter context as a shorthand for referring to afterlife beliefs or experiences, since a truly eschatological worldview would be foreign to Greek thought. In Empedocles, the creation of the cosmos is subject to the coming together and separation of the elements in an endless cycle under the twin impulses of Love and Strife. In Parmenides, Being and Coming-to-be are separated by a gulf; the goddess says of Being that it is, and neither was it in the past nor will it come to be. Likewise, Plato in the *Timaeus* makes a distinction between that

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37 I am not clear on Calov’s original reference, since I was unable to access a copy of his *Systematis locorum theologorum*. Calov may have had in mind John 6:39, 40, and 44 ([ὁ] τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ) or John 2:18 (ἐσχάτη ἡμέρα). For similar phrases, see also Peter 1:5, Jude 1:10 and 1:18, Acts 2:17, James 5:3, 2, Timothy 3:1. For ἐσχάτος, ἐσχάτα used as reference to the time immediately preceding Christ’s return, see Hebrews 1:2, 2 Peter 3:3, 1 Peter 1:20, Jude 1:18, Matthew 12:45, Luke 11:26, 2 Peter 2:20.
which always is and has no becoming and that which becomes but never is (27d-28a). Of the universe, Timaeus says that it has come to be (28b), but Plato does not address the issue of its eternality in time or, indeed, of its end. In spite of all the objections Aristotle raises against the theory of the origination of the universe of the Timaeus (Phys. 251b14–26), he accepts that motion must be eternal (251b29–252b7).

Eschatology in the contemporary sense is thus ruled out in Greek thought. Even though Calov’s term invokes the Greek ἐσχάτον, its use gives complete new content to the Greek word. The Greek does have the meanings of “last,” “to the end,” “finally,” “in the end.”38 But its use is never charged with the theological significance it later has as part of Christian dogmatics, where it not only refers to that portion of Christian dogmatics traditionally called “De novissimis” or “De extremis,” but also to a very specific ideal of what constitutes the “last things,” namely, death, judgment, heaven, and hell. Because the use of “eschatology” is much more laden with Christian presuppositions and hence only applicable to Greek thought in a metaphorical sense, I will set aside this term here. I propose instead “soteriology” as a possible way of speaking about the Greek understanding of the ultimate concerns of mortals, although the use of this term first needs to be justified and elaborated.

III. Soteriology in Plato’s Republic

Can one at least justify the use of the term “soteriology” when speaking of Greek notions of salvation? In one sense, the use of this term is plainly an anachronism. In spite of its Greek morphology (deriving from σωτηρία or “deliverance, safety”), the word, as we have seen, first makes its appearance in academic theology of the 17th century. It becomes widely established only by the 19th century. Nonetheless, if we set aside our expectations of soteriology as the name of a subdiscipline of Christian dogmatics, one could argue for extending the use of the term to Greek philosophy as well, since Greek authors do make use of the term σωτηρία and related terms such as σωτήρ and σώζειν. Plato’s Republic may serve here as an example.40

38 LSJ, s.v. “ἐσχάτον.”
39 LSJ, s.v. “σωτηρία.”
40 One could also have examined other terms such as νέστος in Homer, but this has recently been studied in exemplary detail by Anna Bonifazi (“Inquiring into
The term σωτήρ occurs five times in the Republic;\(^1\) I first list the occurrences:

“And would not such a man be disdainful of wealth too in his youth, but the older he grew the more he would love it because of his participation in the covetous nature and because his virtue is not sincere and pure since it lacks the best guardian?” “What guardian?” said Adeimantus. “Reason,” said I, “blended with culture, which is the only indwelling preserver [σωτήρ] of virtue throughout life in the soul that possesses it.” “Well said,” he replied. “This is the character,” I said, “of the timocratic youth, resembling the city that bears his name.” (549a–b)

“Well, then, there are to be found in other cities rulers and the people as in it, are there not?” “There are.” “Will not all these address one another as fellow-citizens?” “Of course.” “But in addition to citizens, what does the people in other states call its rulers.” “In most cities, masters. In democratic cities, just this, rulers.” “But what of the people in our city. In addition to citizens, what do they call their rulers?” “Saviors [Σωτήρας] and helpers,” he said. (463a–b)

“This difficulty disposed of, we have next to speak of what remains, in what way, namely, and as a result of what studies and pursuits, these preserv- [σωτήρες] of the constitution will form a part of our state, and at what ages they will severally take up each study.” (502c–d)

“That, then, would be two points in succession and two victories for the just man over the unjust. And now for the third in the Olympian fashion to the saviour [σωτήρ] and to Olympian Zeus—observe that other pleasure than that of the intelligence is not altogether even real or pure, but is a kind of scene-painting, as I seem to have heard from some wise man; and yet this would be the greatest and most decisive overthrow.” (583b)

Σωτηρία and forms thereof can be found at 433c8, 429c5, 6, 9 (also σώσι, δισωτήρια), 346a8, 425e3, 430b2, 433b10, 453d11 (also σώζε- σαι), 465d8, and 494a11:

“But moreover,” said I, “if we were required to decide what it is whose indwelling presence will contribute most to making our city good, it would be a difficult decision whether it was the unanimity of rulers and ruled or the conservation [σωτηρία] in the minds of the soldiers of the convictions produced by law as to what things are or are not to be feared, or the watchful intelligence that resides in the guardians, or whether this is the chief cause of its goodness, the principle embodied in child, woman, slave,

\(^{41}\) Namely, at 549b7, 463b1, 502d1, and 583b2.
free, artisan, ruler, and ruled, that each performed his one task as one man and was not a versatile busybody.” (433c–d)

“Bravery too, then, belongs to a city by virtue of a part of itself owing to its possession in that part of a quality that under all conditions will preserve the conviction that things to be feared are precisely those which and such as the lawgiver inculcated in their education. Is not that what you call bravery?”

“I don’t altogether understand what you said,” he replied; “but say it again.” “A kind of conservation [Σωτηρίας],” I said, “is what I mean by bravery.” “What sort of a conservation [Ποιητική]?” “The conservation of the conviction which the law has created by education about fearful things—what and what sort of things are to be feared. And by the phrase [preservation] [Σωτηρίας] ‘under all conditions’ I mean that the brave man preserves it both in pain and pleasures and in desires and fears and does not expel it from his soul.” (429b–d)

And does not each art also yield us benefit that is peculiar to itself and not general, as for example medicine health, the pilot’s art safety [Σωτηρίας] at sea, and the other arts similarly?” (346a)

“Nay, ‘twould not be fitting,” he said, “to dictate to good and honorable men. For most of the enactments that are needed about these things they will easily, I presume, discover.” “Yes, my friend, provided God grants them the preservation [Σωτηρίας] of the principles of law that we have already discussed.” (425d–e)

“The sole aim of our contrivance was that they should be convinced and receive our laws like a dye as it were, so that their belief and faith might be fast-colored both about the things that are to be feared and all other things because of the fitness of their nature and nurture, and that so their dyes might not be washed out by those lyes that have such dread power to scour our beliefs away, pleasure more potent than any detergent or abstergent to accomplish this, and pain and fear and desire more sure than any lye. This power in the soul, then, this unfailing conservation [Σωτηρίας] of right and lawful belief about things to be and not to be feared is what I call and would assume to be courage, unless you have something different to say.” (430a–b)

“I think that this is the remaining virtue in the state after our consideration of soberness, courage, and intelligence, a quality which made it possible for them all to grow up in the body politic and which when they have sprung up preserves [Σωτηρίας] them as long as it is present…” (433b)

“Then we, too, must swim and try to escape out of the sea of argument in the hope that either some dolphin will take us on its back or some other desperate rescue [Σωτηρίας].” (453d)

“The things for which those are felicitated are a small part of what is secured for these. Their victory is fairer and their public support more complete. For the prize of victory that they win is the salvation [Σωτηρίας] of the entire state, the fillet that binds their brows is the public support of
themselves and their children—they receive honor from the city while they live and when they die a worthy burial.” (465d–e)

“From this point of view do you see any salvation [σωτηρίαν] that will suffer the born philosopher to abide in the pursuit and persevere to the end? Consider it in the light of what we said before. We agreed that quickness in learning, memory, courage and magnificence were the traits of this nature.” (494a–b)

I have cited the occurrences in detail to show the enormous range of meanings the term can take on, not just in a lexical sense (i.e., as “preservation,” “conservation,” “rescue”), but also being used at times in a nautical context, at others in a political context, and at still others in a psychological context. Plato also uses the term metaphorically or as a literary allusion (e.g., in the reference to the story of Arion). This makes it difficult to define Platonic “soteriology” precisely. The use of terms pertaining to a broad notion of salvation does not justify us in imputing a “soteriology” to Plato, unless of course we further clarify wherein exactly this “soteriology” lies. But the argument is purely lexical at this stage. What I wish to argue is not that salvation is present in ancient authors (and least of all that it is present in a sense analogous to Christian notions), but that it is worth considering how ancient philosophy addressed itself to the task of answering man’s existential questions, and that this almost always includes some conception of the soul’s ultimate fate and purpose. It is this oversight of ancient philosophers’ concern with providing some form of soteriological, self-transformative, or emancipatory praxis that this volume as a whole seeks to redress.

In any case, the preceding discussion has established that terms pertaining to a broad notion of salvation do occur in the Republic, and their use is programmatic. The “salvation” Plato speaks of may or may not be philosophical in nature (I have argued elsewhere that it is42), but it certainly gives us grounds for looking to see wherein it might lie. It is in this sense of an open-ended question, supported both by lexical usage and philosophical content, that the words “salvation” and “soteriology” will be used in this volume.

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IV. Elements of a Philosophical Soteriology

In the following, I therefore set aside the problem of using the word “soteriology” to speak of a tradition that, strictly speaking, did not develop a “doctrine of salvation,” and focus instead on a non-theological soteriology, as I see it in ancient authors. I will focus on five elements I consider central to Greek philosophical soteriology:

1. Singularity,
2. Soul,
3. Death,
4. Initiation, and
5. Eudaimonia.

What do I mean by “singularity”? The contrast between the singular and the particular is clarified by Reiner Schürmann as follows:

… death as mine temporalizes phenomena because it is absolutely singular. But the singular cannot be treated as the determinate negation of the universal; the contrary opposite of the universal is the particular. It takes a neglect of the persistent tie between time and the singular, a tie signified to me by my death, to append these conflicting strategies to the list, long since Antiquity, of terms that are mutually exclusive within a genus and jointly exhaustive of it.\(^{43}\)

Schürmann’s distinction between the singular and particular is essential to reading ancient texts, because it lets us appreciate an aspect of them that is all too often overlooked in our scientific accounts: that they are also, at one level, the accounts of living-and-dying individuals. For example, when we read Plato, we are most often interested in whether or not he held a “theory of Forms.” We may wonder about how this theory relates to the Parmenidean doctrine concerning Being or the Aristotelian teaching of form in matter (ἐν οἷς ἐίδος). But we thereby forget that Plato’s philosophy is not simply reducible to bibliography, but also embodies a specific lifespan and a trajectory, that is to say, a biography. Debra Nails has recently shown that Plato’s characters all bear the names of real, existent people.\(^{44}\)

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and responsible way.\textsuperscript{45} Likewise, in his book \textit{The Being of the Beautiful}, Seth Benardete points out, "the longest series of dialogues, however, is connected in order of time through an external event, the trial and death of Socrates: \textit{Theaetetus, Euthyphro, Sophist, Statesman, Apology of Socrates, Crito} and \textit{Phaedo}."\textsuperscript{46} Thus, beyond and besides our textual fetishes, ancient texts were also concerned with the fates of mortals. Homer sings of Achilles to preserve his mortal voice. When Odysseus visits the dead hero in the Underworld and attempts to console him, Achilles’ rebuke follows swiftly:

O shining Odysseus, never try to console me for dying.  
I would rather follow the plow as thrall to another  
man, one with no land allotted to him and not much to live on,  
than be a king over all the perished dead. (\textit{Od. XI. 488–91}; Lattimore trans.)

It is only when Odysseus narrates to him concerning the deeds of his son Neoptolemus that Achilles’ shade is appeased and strides away happy at hearing of his son’s fame (ibid., 538–40). This brief vignette illustrates something important we seem to have forgotten in contemporary academic philosophy: metaphysical \textit{λέγοι} are poor consolation for mortality. In contrast, ancient authors seem to have better appreciated the mortal condition, and the need for some form of soteriological response to it.

In the Platonic context, singularity requires a further clarification. “Plato” has dominated philosophy throughout its history in a very specific way: as a metaphysician. In fact, the most recent chapter in the history of philosophy—Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, to name a few—tries to overthrow this Platonic legacy. My argument here is that through the notion of singularity something essential remains in the Platonic project, an aspect that is not reducible to any metaphysics. Platonic “\textit{Forms}” are important, but they are always presented in a mythic or hypothetical context, and especially as part of an explanation of the paradoxical nature of Becoming. Specifically, Plato identifies three general \textit{topoi} of Becoming. These are:

1. The body (cf. \textit{Phaedo}),
2. The city (cf. \textit{Republic}), and

\textsuperscript{45} Nails 2002, xxxviii.
3. The cosmos (cf. *Timaeus*).
Weaving these three together (for example, the *Phaedrus* uses *eros* and writing to distinguish between what is fleeting versus what is abiding), Plato indeed does work with a broad palette of themes. But as I showed above, the notion of singularity is not reducible to the notion of particularity. Particularity, always tied to universals, requires at some level an engagement with Forms, whether immanent or otherwise. But by using narrative techniques such as the dramatic narrative which preserves Socrates’ singularity, as well as the singularity of every participant, Plato creates a dialogical universe which is populated by singulars. Whether “Platonic metaphysics” can or cannot be overcome, Plato’s work can never be reduced to how it appears in the history of philosophy. This aspect of Plato, beyond the body, city, and cosmos, and their ontological and epistemological referent, God, is worth philosophical rethinking. Soteriology ultimately serves to underscore the tragic condition of being a specific human, given over to death and threatened by the possibility of oblivion. With this philosophical clarification of a philosophical project, I wish to qualify the way in which “salvation” and “soteriology” are no longer simply abandoned to “religion.” Philosophers can and must say something about this very important matter. In doing so, they not only follow the ancients, but also address our contemporary geo-political situation.

The notion of singularity is crucial to salvation, because it is always *qua* singular that a mortal faces death. In *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, Tolstoy brilliantly explores the puzzle that whereas language consists of general statements, it is always *qua* an individual that one must die when he shows Ilych grappling with the proposition “Caius is a man, men are mortal, therefore Caius is mortal.” This proposition had always seemed correct to Ilych when applied to Caius, but not as applied to himself. Yet, as death approaches, Ilych realizes with penetrating insight that the propositional structure of reality had always blinded him to the fact of his own death, a fact no proposition seems capable of expressing. In death (and in love) the singular is revealed as inexpressible by words.

Singularity, by setting aside the consolations of metaphysics, i.e., both theology and technology, provides a way to a non-theological soteriology. In the encounter between the individual and his mortality, death is revealed as inescapably mine. This singularization drives back
philosophy from its textual fetishes to the urgent mortal task of addressing man in his ultimate concern.\(^47\)

Here, one might oppose that if death reveals the utter “impossibility of possibility”\(^48\) salvation is an illusion, and an indulgence. For, if the individual dies and there is nothing more to be done, then the only consolation is this life with its maximization of individual glory and pleasure. But this would be too hasty. As Gomperz has shown, Empedoclean and Homeric psychology possessed a two-soul theory. On the one hand, there was νιμωσ, which I translate as “mortal soul.” θυμωσ was responsible for personal identity and for the nutritive, emotional, volitional, and intellectual aspects of a person. On the other hand, there was ψυχη, which although always associated with θυμωσ in a body, exceeded the lifespan of the latter. θυμωσ does not possess any independent existence once separated from the body; although it may be briefly scattered or even temporarily escape the body, it must, if the person is to live, return to the body immediately. Should it fail to do so, the body will perish and so will the θυμωσ. The ψυχη, on the other hand, purely a shade, flits underground to Hades. Thus, two “inner entities” mark the loss of consciousness (syncope), revival, and death: ψυχη and θυμωσ. In general, ψυχη departs at syncope, and the θυμωσ returns. It is the loss of ψυχη that determines a man’s death and the θυμωσ that experiences woe at this possibility. I cite one example, quoting the anguished Achilles:

> The same fate comes to him who holds back and to him who fights, in equal timē (honor) are the coward and the brave man. Likewise, the man who has done nothing and the one who has accomplished much both die. Nor is there any profit for me, from the time when I suffered grief in my thumos, always to fight, setting my psukhe at hazard. (Iliad IX. 318–22; Caswell trans.)

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\(^{48}\) The phrase is from Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 307. In Heidegger’s work, the phrase refers to the fact that death, as something that is “one’s utmost … non-relational, and … not to be outstripped” (ibid., 294, italics in original), leaves nothing over, no residual possibility of man’s existence. In such a philosophy of radical immanence, salvation of course is not a meaningful notion, which is why Heidegger posits existential “resoluteness” in its place.
Greek thinkers thus seem to have wanted to have it both ways. On the one hand, Homer is committed to Achilles, Patroclus, Hector and others as mortal heroes. Their death and the woe the Achaeans or the Trojans experience at this loss are important themes to the poet; he will not quickly gloss over them or provide metaphysical redemption. The loss of a person cannot be rationalized away. In the *Odyssey*, among the many great heroes Odysseus meets in Hades, first of all he meets his companion Elpenor, who died a rather inglorious death. And yet his lament is preserved to us. On the other hand, the *σώματος* is not the full story. Either the ψυχή flits out (to Hades) as Odysseus’ mother tells him (IX.222) or an εἰδώλων as Odysseus himself sees of Heracles (IX.602).

In my first book, I focused very strongly on *σώματος* and the consequences of this mortal soul for philosophy. I argued that the subsumption of *σώματος* under ψυχή was a problem for philosophy, and perhaps explains our present-day neglect of mortality. Thus, my book concluded by rejecting the seductions of metaphysical transcendence, and argued for a return to mortality. But this left a question open: what of the ψυχή and its fate? Does this not enable us to speak of a non-metaphysical transcendence? In the present volume, I would like to acknowledge that ψυχή presents a problem and the relation of soteriology to ψυχή needs to be still be thought through. How might the concerns of ψυχή differ from those of *σώματος*? In what way does the existence and endurance of ψυχή beyond the death of the body and of *σώματος* call for some form of philosophy addressed not just to *σώματος* and its mortal concerns, but also to ψυχή? 49

These are questions that cannot be answered in an introduction such as this. The articles in this volume do a much better job of highlighting the way different traditions and different philosophers have responded to these challenges. The purpose of this introduction, however, is to highlight some issues that need to be kept in mind when reading the volume.

49 I was aware of the problem, but could not address it in my first book, which was on mortal philosophy. Thus, I concluded with a question, and a promise: “My analysis has taken the form of a ‘return’ from the transcendence of metaphysics, texts, and traditions. But, from this ‘purified’ state, is another form of transcendence possible for the mortal singular? But that is a subject for another work; here, I end the ‘purification’ portion of Parmenides, that is, our traditional reception. A philosophical investigation whereby Parmenides provides a positive response to the ultimate concerns of the mortal reader constitutes the next step.” Adluri 2011, 135.
Once again, salvation has to be posed as a concern, but also as a question and a problem. The answer is not as simple as saying “one is saved,” because even then the question will arise, “what is saved and how is it saved?” Mortality remains one of the basic phenomenological traits of existence, which cannot be erased even on propounding a doctrine of salvation, because it is only against the background of our mortality that soteriological doctrines make sense.

As an example of just how skillfully Greek philosophers wove mortal concerns into philosophical and cosmological doctrines, I shall take up Heraclitus’ thought. Nearly 30 years after M. L. West declared in clear and unambiguous terms that there is no “Logos-Doctrine” in Heraclitus, scholarship continues to focus on either λόγος or flux as the primary theme of Heraclitus’ philosophy. The latter, addressed as the “flux doctrine” and first popularized by Plato, has its champions even today. On the other hand, Kahn sees in Heraclitus’ doctrine of λόγος a committed monism and eschatology; in fact, he organizes the fragments in such a way that they culminate in Zeus’ governance of the universe. Besides these two extremes, others, either happy or unhappy with his riddling style, throw up their hands at the notion of a coherent doctrine.

To be sure, Heraclitus provides many clues to justify a variety of interpretations and attitudes. Yet, a central philosophical paradox, distinct from his enigmatic style, remains: how does he understand temporality, so that both the doctrine of transcendent λόγος and the teaching of rapid flux become possible in the first place?

A philological analysis of the texts demonstrates the significance of θάνατος to Heraclitus. “Θάνατος” (and its verbal relatives such as ἐνήλικα, ἐπονήλικα, τεχνηλότος) is the most frequent term of philosophical importance, occurring twelve times (fragments 21, 26, 27, 29, 36, 48, 62, 76, 77, 88). Θάνατος is not only the most frequently named theme (outnumbering ψυχή, λόγος, ἄν ἐν the writings of Heraclitus, but also the most philosophically significant. Heraclitus relates death to the life and decay of mortals (88), to souls (ψυχή, 36), fate (μοῖρα, 25), to ever-flowing fame (κλέος δύναμεν ἵππον, 29), to religious ritual, to sleep (ὑπνοι, 21), and to the immortals (62).

There is nothing morbid or otherworldly about Heraclitus’ extended meditation on death: he talks of “Corpses more fit to be thrown out than dung.” Even though humans cannot anticipate or comprehend what awaits them after death, death is of deep philosophical significance (frag. 27). As mortals, our temporality is defined by the paradoxical presence of death in life. Heraclitean philosophy uses death to create a complex integration of mortals and immortals: “Immortals are mortals, mortals immortal, living the others’ death, dead in the others’ life” (frag. 62).

Once we recognize that Heraclitean wisdom is also an understanding of the nature of death, we begin to see not a positivistic doctrine, but a thanatology spread out extensively through the extant fragments, problematizing clear and positivistic philosophical axioms. Flux and eternal λόγος reveal two forms of temporality, which Heraclitus understands in relation to Ἀνιστός. The paradoxical relationship of Ἀνιστός and βίος captures the simultaneity of change and stability or rather of flux and eternity. The word “αἰών” holds the key to understanding Heraclitus’ view of time: rather than meaning eternity, it captures the Janus-faced temporality underlying Heraclitean thought.

Heraclitus relates Ἀνιστός to ὕπνος (sleep), to γίνεσις, to πόλεμος (war), and finally to Dionysos. In fragments 21 and 26, preserved by Clement of Alexandria, we read:

21. Death is all things we see awake; all we see asleep is sleep.
26. A man strikes a light for himself in the night, when his sight is quenched. Living, he touched the dead in his sleep; having awakened, he touches the sleeper.

Here, Heraclitus is exploiting a classic relationship between sleep and death, which begins in Hesiod, and continues even to our day: Sleep is the brother of Death. Hesiod writes:

And night bore hateful Doom and black Fate
And Death, and Sleep, and the brood of Dreams. (Hesiod, Theogony, 211 – 213)

Later, Hesiod continues describing the relationship of sleep and death in his description of the house of black Night:

There the children of black Night have their house,
Sleep and Death, awesome gods. (Hesiod, Theogony, 751–764)

In Homer too, we have the episode of Hera’s deception of Zeus, under the influence of Ἡρα, allowing Ἀνιστός to implement part two of her plan, namely to wreak destruction on the Trojans. Parmenides was also
impressed by the relationship of Night and light, as well as painful birth and hateful death. All these elements occur in Parmenides’ proem as well as his cosmology. Having suggested the widespread importance of the ἕναστος—ἔπνος coupling to Presocratic thought, let us return specifically to Heraclitus and the two fragments above.

The standard interpretation of these quotes is: “We are surrounded by a thicket of riddles, but a pattern begins to emerge, a sequence of psychic stages linked to one another by a thread of quenchings and lightings and ending by a cyclical return to the starting point.”52 Heraclitus links ἕναστος and ἔπνος to construct a link between perception and knowing. This knowing occurs neither in the dark, nor is it foolish, as “private understanding” would imply. It is not one of pure λόγος either. It is a “lighting” which one illumines by oneself, not in terms of understanding but in terms of one’s own existence. Ramfos links this dark seeing to Oedipus, and argues that one does not see with the eyes; what offers itself to sight is the invisible side of things as absent, as a blindspot.53 The presence of death in life is never available to perception. It can only be given as a lived, experienced, personal testimony.

31. The reversals (tropai) of fire: first sea; but of sea half is earth, half lightening storm.
76. Plutarch: [As Heraclitus said, the death of fire is birth for air and death of air is birth for water.]

On the level of the cosmos, ἕναστος is interchangeable with τροπαί. The cyclical process of cosmogony is, in its structure, not different from the cycle of human life, in which βίος and ἕναστος co-mingle. Kirk thinks the use of ἕναστος is merely an idiosyncratic metaphor on Heraclitus’ part.54 I argue that this use of ἕναστος inscribes mortal temporality onto the universe.

Heraclitus’ use of ἕναστος extends from the cycles of the cosmos to the fate of individual souls. It underlines Heraclitus’ universe as one where paradox is not just a stylistic device. He speaks in riddles because our existence is a riddle. The paradoxical nature of Heraclitean sayings relate to the paradoxical experience of time. Is time stable or in flux? Heraclitus uses the word “αἰών” for time. From the Neoplatonists on,

52 Kahn 1979, 215.
αἰὼν means eternity as opposed to χρόνος or “time.” 55 (In Plotinus, eternity again is of two types, a good eternity αἰὼν in which everything is there simultaneously, while ἄδικον designating unending duration, is a bad eternity.) In Homer, αἰὼν signifies something quite different, namely the marrow of a bone, and what is present in sperm. Benveniste explains that αἰὼν in Homer designates “the force of life, the source of vitality.” 56 Someone’s αἰὼν is his natural lifespan. The totality of one’s life (seventy or eighty years) becomes the measure by which a human and vital force calibrates the entire universe. Temporality for Heraclitus is thus one that takes θάνατος into account: it is aionic, neither a flux in which λόγος is impossible, nor a λόγος in which change is relegated to unreality. In this way, we can understand fragment 52, preserved by Hippolytus and also Lucian: “Αἰὼν is a child at play, playing draughts; the kingship is a child’s.” Hippolytus reads Heraclitus correctly in the Refutatio (IX, 9, 1) when he says that Heraclitus says that the whole is mortal and immortal, and that λόγος is αἰών. Child’s play, riddle, a dark light, these are ways in which Heraclitus is pointing to the complicated structure of αἰὼν. The history of philosophy dismantles this riddle, this play of αἰὼν. In our time, we want to focus on one aspect, and pin Heraclitus down to either a Cratylean flux or an overarching λόγος-based eternity.

In contrast to this view, Heraclitus’ meditations on time unfold a pan-mortal viewpoint that includes an account of both mortals and immortals, and thus flux and transcendence. θάνατος rather than λόγος, or rather a thanatology defines and describes time as we mortals experience it, and by extension, the κόσμος we mortals inhabit. Λόγος is just one aspect of the riddle of time. The complete understanding of the riddle results in what a recent scholar calls “temporal aporia.” 57

Θάνατος thus imbues the Heraclitean universe with a surprisingly complex temporality. His is not a simple universe of eternal being nor is it one of rapid flux. Instead, Heraclitus describes a mortal temporality, with mortal life as the basic temporal phenomenon. He paradoxically unites life and death, flux and stable λόγος.

Understanding the centrality of the phenomenon of death to ancient cosmologies is an important key to interpreting the work of ancient philosophers correctly. But we must be careful to note that this concern with death was not a philosophically stylized cognition. In modern and contemporary philosophy, we have many examples of thinkers who propound the importance of death (e.g., Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre). But this engagement with death differs from the ancient experience, which was mediated not by a philosophical reflection but by a form of near-death experience. The institution of ritual descent or κατάβασις in which the initiate was made to undergo an encounter with his death is well studied.\(^58\) The researches of Burkert,\(^59\) Kingsley,\(^60\) and Johnston\(^61\) have shown how significant this theme is to ancient philosophical and religious traditions. Albinus has shown its importance in the Republic\(^62\) and Riedweg has recently attempted to reconstruct from the Gold Leaves the narrative recounted in the ἱερός λόγος told the initiate, a narrative that involves death and κατάβασις as its first two stages.\(^63\) My own work has focused on the centrality of this theme in the Platonic dialogues, and on how the correct transmission of initiatory wisdom enables a transition for the initiate to correct knowledge of Being and, with it, to a state of ἐγκληματική.\(^64\) Rather than reprise these well-known researches, to which the articles by Miguel Herrero and Barbara Sattler in this volume add further material, I would merely like to emphasize the point that the presence of the descent-death-rebirth-ascent motif in ancient philosophy, whether in the form of an actual ritual descent or as a significant metaphor as in Plato’s


\(^59\) See his article “Das Proömium des Parmenides und die Katabasis des Pythagoras,” reprinted in a translation as chapter 3 of this volume.

\(^60\) See n. 9 above.


Republic, gives renewed urgency to the mortal task of philosophy. It brings philosophy out of being a game, even if a very sophisticated one, and makes it existentially and ethically relevant again. Singularity rather than particularity, soul rather than subject, mortality rather than finitude, and initiation rather than anxiety—these, then, prove to be the way to a non-theological soteriology.

Finally, let me address, albeit tentatively, the nature of this proposed salvation. We have several sources that suggest that the goal of this soteriological path was ἔκδαιλομα. Empedocles (frag. B114/119) recounts the state of bliss the soul in its original, divine state experiences; after wandering for thrice ten thousand years, provided it has lived intelligently, it can expect a return to the company of the blessed ones. Likewise Diotima in the Symposium propounds ἔκδαιλομα as the final goal. When Socrates in response to her question regarding what someone who desires good things has once those things have become his own replies, “He’ll have happiness” (205a), she answers, “There’s no need to ask further, ‘What’s the point of wanting happiness?’ The answer you just gave seems to be final” (205a). This concern with ἔκδαιλομα is also a feature of Aristotle’s philosophy. In A2 of the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle already establishes ἔκδαιλομα as the goal. It alone meets the criteria of the Good, namely, that it be an end in itself, perfect, and self-sufficient (1096a11–7a14); and in K 7 and 8, it is revealed that of all the activities of man, contemplation is the most blessed and makes him most akin to the immortals (1177b21–32 and 1178b23–24). Thus, one could also speak of the soteriological goal pursued by Plato and Aristotle as a noetic transcendence, an experience that involves a cognitive experience and is simultaneously rational and transformative.

Rosen puts it well: “The theme of descent plays an important role in the dramatic structure of the Republic. To note only the obvious, Socrates and Glaucon descend from Athens to Piraeus at the very beginning of the dialogue; Book Seven begins with a descent from the sunlight into the cave of shadows...; the dialogue closes with an account of the descent of Er into Hades. Each of these descents is described in considerably greater detail than the outstanding example of ascent to the Idea of the Good, or more properly, to its surrogate, the image of the sun.” Stanley Rosen, Plato’s Republic: A Study (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

The passage in Met. A.7 (1072b15) where Aristotle speaks of the activity of the unmoved mover does not, as one might expect, refer to ἔκδαιλομα but to ἡδονή. Nonetheless, since the life of God is one of eternal (self-)contemplation (see 1072b19–30 and 1074b33), Aristotle may simply mean that the pleasure he experiences is that of ἔκδαιλομα.
The concern with “salvation” thus proves not to be an irrational enterprise, but simply, as Plato and Aristotle both make amply clear, the concern with leading the best and most virtuous life possible for man *qua* man. That they simultaneously attribute an element of divinity to such a life should not lead us to dismiss the arguments with which they seek to demonstrate this claim.

V. On the Articles in this Volume

Setting out from this background, the articles in this volume adopt various approaches to the question of Greek soteriology. Miguel Herrero in his article looks at the way Homer’s *Odyssey* served as a literary model for later soteriological philosophies, and suggests that Greek salvation is characterized by notions of wandering, arrival, supplication, and receiving of protection. Arbogast Schmitt’s article takes up the modern prejudice against seeing genuine forms of self-determination in ancient thought. Schmitt presents numerous examples from the Homeric epics that demonstrate that the sense of existing in a reciprocal relationship with the gods need not imply that ancient Greek thought was incapable of identifying a sphere of genuinely free human activity. The third article in the volume is a translation of Walter Burkert’s 1969 study, already alluded to above. Prof. Burkert has prefaced this essay with a brief comment on its status in the context of newer materials that have since come to light. Alberto Bernabé’s article too shows how Plato takes up and reuses Orphic materials, albeit in service of “deeper philosophical purposes.” Barbara Sattler’s article continues with an examination of the parallels between the Eleusinian mysteries and the Platonic dialogues. In his article Stephen Menn examines the relation of political philosophy to soteriological concerns. He suggests that Plato remains skeptical about the possibility of rhetoric and political virtue of producing the promised σωτηρία, instead believing that “only some quite different kind of philosophy can save us.” In our article, John Lenz and I take up this very point. We demonstrate how the *Republic* enters politics in Book II with the myth of Gyges, but exits it with the myth of Er in Book X. The failure of political virtue to produce salvation (underscored by the fact that even a citizen of the καλλίστοι makes a bad choice at the lot of lives in *Rep.* X) thus opens the way to a non-political understanding of salvation. The longest article in this collection, John Bussanich’s piece makes a strong case for taking
Plato’s salvific concerns seriously. Plato’s eschatological myths, Bussanich shows, are not simply literary creations, created as adjuncts to his epistemological or political concerns. Rather, they are based on a precise and pragmatic logic: if the soul can only effect its purification bit-by-bit and over multiple lifetimes, the rebirth cycle itself needs to be “ethicized.” Bussanich thus advocates seeing a notion of causality analogous to the Indian *karma* in Platonic and Plotinian philosophy. Svetla Slaveva-Griffin’s following article takes up this very suggestion, although she applies it to the notion of “purification” in Plotinian philosophy. Comparisons with the Bhagavad Gītā suggest that there may be useful avenues for thinking about how Greek notions of philosophy can help us read the Indian sources too. The final two articles in this collection are concerned with the question of memory and of theurgy. Luc Brisson demonstrates how complex issues relating to memory shape Plotinus’ thought. Through a virtuoso analysis of the Plotinian theory of memory, he shows that the notion of memory is essentially implied in all forms of soteriological thinking: “One cannot … speak of the salvation of the soul without evoking memory.” Finally, John Finamore’s article shows how late Neoplatonic thinkers began to reshape the Plotinian system to account for perceived problems, and to make space for ritual practices. Thus, with Iamblichus’ blend of theurgy with philosophy, we come full circle.