

Contents

<i>Prologue</i>	<i>ix</i>
Introduction	1
Part 1 Origin and Maturity of Hellenic Philosophy	
1 The Origin of Hellenic Philosophy	7
Introduction	7
Three Basic Questions	10
The Way from Hellas to the Nile	11
The Origin of Hellenic Philosophy	15
Modern Europeans vs. Ancient Hellenes	22
Conclusion	28
Appendix: Hellenic Sources	31
2 Plato and European Philosophy	59
Introduction	59
Plato and Platonism	60
Two Versions of Platonism	61
Augustine vs Porphyry the Platonist	65
Platonism in the Italian Renaissance	74
Adventures of Platonic Philosophy	76
Conclusion	81
3 Aristotle and Western Rationality	97
Introduction	97
The Scope of this Study	99
Aristotle's Move from <i>Logos</i> to <i>Nous</i>	101
Aristotle on Divine and Human Beings	104
Distinguishing Between <i>Ontology</i> and <i>Ousiology</i>	107
Perfecting the Aristotelian Political Animal	110
Possible Post-modern Objections to Aristotle	112
Conclusion	117

Part 2 Critique and Character of Hellenic Philosophy

4	Aristotle's Critique of Plato's Polity	139
	Introduction	139
	The Nature of the Problem	139
	Community of Women and Children	141
	Community of Property	144
	Conclusion	146
5	Pletho's Critique of Aristotelian Novelties	153
	Introduction	153
	Innovations in Theology and Ontology	155
	The Aristotelian Homonymy of Being	157
	Innovations in Psychology, Ethics and Cosmology	158
	Critique of Aristotle's Theories of Art and Cause	161
	Critique of Aristotle's Critique of the Theory of Ideas	163
	Conclusion	164
6	The Character of Hellenic Philosophy	171
	Introduction	171
	The Ambiguity of the Appellation "Western"	173
	Hellenic Philosophy Delineated	176
	Hellenic Philosophy and "European Philosophy"	178
	Conclusion	180
	<i>Glossary</i>	195
	<i>Bibliography</i>	201
	<i>Index</i>	211

Chapter 1

The Origin of Hellenic Philosophy

Introduction

Alexander the Great built several great cities along the way from Pella, his birthplace in Hellenic Macedonia, to Punjab in Northern India, which marked the eastward limit of his campaign against the Persian Empire. Even before Alexander's time, the Persians had reached the shores of Eastern Mediterranean and had conquered many peoples including the two friendly nations, the Hellenes of Asia Minor and the Egyptians. In desperation, they had expected that Ammon (or Zeus) would send them a liberator. In Alexander the Great, they found such a god-sent leader, liberator and benefactor. The most magnificent of the cities bearing Alexander's name flourished on the banks of the Nile in Northern or Lower Egypt.¹

Alexandria of the Nile was destined to function as the great melting pot where a cultural trinity, constituted by the spirit of Hellas (or Europe), Egypt (or Africa),² and Near East (or Asia) met, mated and fused together for the first time in recorded history.³ As a result of that felicitous meeting of three diverse cultural traditions, a prolific fertilization of the spirit was accomplished in Alexandria. For it was there, in Alexandria of the Nile, where Platonism was reborn and renewed under the new names of Christian, Jewish, Gnostic, Hermetic, and Hellenic Platonism.⁴ It would seem, in this light, that Plato, who had inherited from the Pythagorean tradition (through Socrates and Archytas respectively)⁵ a double debt,⁶ was able to pay off the debt, with the accumulated interest in the interval of centuries of Hellenic philosophy.⁷

At the present, however, I would like to concentrate on the roots rather than the branches, blossoms, and fruits of the tree of Platonism and of Hellenic Philosophy generally, in Egypt and in Northern Africa.⁸ But even to speak of a possible Egyptian connection in Ancient Hellenic philosophy (or science and religion for that matter) is considered "anathema" by the prevailing scholarly opinion in the West. For the conventional European historiography, as practiced systematically in the last two centuries, claims rather dogmatically that the scientific method has set clearly marked and well-defined boundaries for the discipline of Hellenic philosophy, covering the period from Thales to Aristotle only.⁹

Accordingly, what the Hellenic genius had created before Thales of Miletus (6th BC) is conveniently assigned to "mythical account" (*mythos*) as opposed to

“rational account” (*logos*), which is considered as trademark of pure “rationality” in philosophy and science.¹⁰ What the Hellenic genius created after Aristotle of Stagira (384-322 BC) is often considered as decadent and set aside. However, what the same Hellenic genius created during the short period from Thales to Aristotle (6th-4th BC), in an effort to explain the origin of the orderly cosmos and to effect the political reorganization of human life in the Hellenic *polis*, is praised as Hellenic “rationality” at its finest moment.¹¹

The implication of this interpretation is that the scientific and philosophic spirit was a rather short-lived Hellenic invention. For, we are told that the inquiring mind was born in the lovely land of Hellenic Ionia in Asia Minor, and was strengthened by the bright light of the Mediterranean sun. It was bathed in the clean blue waters of the Aegean Sea, being nurtured by the tolerant laws of the Hellenic free city-states, with their vigilant protection of the freedom of thought and speech. And it suddenly died out when Alexander the Great (the student of the last great Hellenic philosopher, Aristotle) put an end to the political liberties of those enviable free city-states at the battle of Chaeronea in 338 BC.¹²

The free spirit of scientific inquiry and philosophical speculation hibernated after that tragedy, so the story goes, for nearly two millennia, until the seventeenth century. Then, suddenly, the same philosophic and scientific spirit was revived in Northern Europe causing the great discoveries and technological achievements of modern times. On these achievements the Europeans, (especially the British, the French, the Dutch, and the German), have based over the years not only their economic and strategic power, but also their inordinate claims to cultural superiority, political hegemony and, for centuries, global colonization. Americans seem to follow them blindly, in this blind alley.

In this conventional light, then, it would seem that the Ancient Hellenes are acknowledged as the true teachers of a higher civilization. For Modern Europeans, they alone have set the standards of methodical inquiry into the nature of things and of political organization of human affairs, which can make life worth living for any intelligent, ethically responsible, and politically mature person. In this European mythology, those “Glorious Greeks” are supposed to have descended from the North, of course, and to have been self-taught, when it comes to things of higher culture such as politics, poetics, art, science, and philosophy.¹³

That is the story constantly, commonly, and conventionally told about the Ancient Hellenes by Modern Europeans in the histories of so-called “Western philosophy.”¹⁴ Assuming that the story is meant to glorify the Hellenes, by frankly acknowledging their achievements and solid contributions to our common civilization, we should consider whether the story is also “historically sound.” To do so briefly, it would be necessary to address the following pertinent questions: How did the Ancient Hellenes perceive themselves and their relations to other non-Hellenic peoples, who surrounded them in historical times? Did they see themselves as the “potential teachers” of the Northern Europeans? Or, rather, did they consider themselves as students who had much to learn from the non-Hellenic

civilizations of the great rivers (the Nile, the Euphrates, and even the Indus), which lured Alexander and directed his amazing energy relentlessly, not westward, but eastward?

Well, I would like to suggest that the available literary evidence (from Homer and Herodotus to Plato, Aristotle, Isocrates, Plutarch, Porphyry, and beyond) would support the latter hypothesis only.¹⁵ In their own eyes the Ancient Hellenes, at least the intellectually aware among them, were the newcomers on the historical scene, who desired to learn from those who already knew. And they did learn from others, especially the nearby and wise Egyptians, whom they admired as much as the Northern Europeans would later admire the Ancient Hellenes. This was to take place in the distant future, when Europeans would have learned to read and appreciate the Hellenic sciences, arts, poetry, and philosophy.¹⁶

So, even if we accept the claim that the Ancient Athenians entertained the strange notion that, in comparison with other Hellenic tribes, they were like the cicadas of the Attic soil (autochthonous and aboriginal), this notion would certainly refer to their bodily birth only. Politically understood, it might have advantaged them over others by emphasizing their antiquity.¹⁷ But in the sphere of the spirit, that is, in the arts and sciences, philosophy and religion, political organization and law, all Hellenic tribes (Ionian, Aeolian, and Dorian) were conscious of their youthful lack of wisdom and refinement, when compared with the much older, richer, and more civilized Egyptians. Like children, the travelling and intelligent Hellenes were full of questions and in awe of the experienced and “learned Egyptians.”¹⁸ The wonderful works of Egyptian art and the wise words of Egyptian sages made a lasting impression on the impressionable Hellenic minds.¹⁹

Renowned Hellenic travelers and theorists, such as Solon of Athens, Thales of Miletus, Pythagoras of Samos, Democritus, Plato, Herodotus, and Eudoxus, to mention only the most notable, all had traveled extensively and, according to an Ancient Hellenic tradition, had visited Egypt too.²⁰ They were greeted abroad perhaps in the same manner as Solon was greeted by an old Egyptian sage saying to him: “Solon, you Greeks are never anything but children, and there is not an old man among you.”²¹ As we will see below, to the Ancient Hellenes, especially to the Hellenic philosophers, this Egyptian assertion was nothing but a self-evident truth. That Modern European historians of Ancient Hellenic Philosophy overlook the simple truth of this historical fact was a puzzle for me (as an ardent student of philosophy), which originally motivated and ultimately justified the genesis of this study.²²

Apparently, then, if the Ancient Hellenes desired enlightenment, they had to look to the East and South, that is, the realm of the rising Sun and the warm Wind. They could not possibly have looked to the West and North which, in their imagination, were places associated with darkness, dampness, and death. If we wish, therefore, to identify the origins of fecund ideas of Hellenic philosophy relating to Pythagorean “number theory,”²³ to Socratic “care of the soul,”²⁴ or even to Platonic “ideal state,” we should know where to look for their roots.²⁵

Three Basic Questions

To bring this prolonged introduction to an end and come to the core of the matter under consideration, it should be stated from the outset that our discussion will be limited and focused on the following three basic and closely related questions only:

First, what did the poets, the historians, and especially the philosophers of Ancient Hellas, know about the Egyptians, their civilized life, and their possible relation to Hellenic culture?

Second, how did the Hellenic philosophers, especially Plato and Aristotle, conceive of the origin of philosophy as a cultural phenomenon and its possible connection with Egypt in the distant past?

Third, if it appears that the picture which the Ancient Hellenes had of themselves and the people around them, especially the Egyptians, does not cohere with the picture, which is presented by the Modern Europeans, then we will have a serious dilemma. For we will have to face the question: Which of the two presented views is more likely to be accurate, closer to historical truth, and preferable to unbiased students of philosophy, who are ardent lovers of wisdom and truth?

I shall argue, regarding the first question, that by the sixth century, when Hellenic philosophy conventionally began with Thales of Miletus, travel by sea was easy, from the Aegean islands and the Hellenic cities in Asia Minor to the Delta of the Nile. Furthermore, the language barrier had been considerably overcome by trained Egyptian interpreters at least a century earlier. More significantly, during the sixth and subsequent centuries, the two nations were brought closer to each other by the “common threat” of the powerful Persian Empire. At that crucial time, it was rapidly expanding westward at the expense of the allied nations, Egypt and Hellas. So they had to stand together to defend what was their common cultural ground and freedom.

Regarding the second question, I shall argue that the Hellenic philosophers (unlike Modern European historians of philosophy), could not have claimed and as a matter of fact did not claim, that philosophy, science, and civilization originated with them “solely.” Their cyclical conception of time and history, and their broad conception of philosophy as “the wonderful art of wondering,” would not have allowed them such a narrow and petty view.²⁶ Therefore, we will conclude that the Ancient Hellenes were much more open-minded on the question of “origins” than their apparent admirers, the Modern European thinkers.

I shall argue further, regarding the third question, and conclude with the observation that the two methods (the Ancient/Hellenic and the Modern/European) of approaching the “origin of philosophy” problem, and its relation to Ancient Hellenes and to Ancient Egyptians, yield results clearly incompatible. It would be, therefore, reasonable for us to accept the one, which seems closer to the truth and the least biased. That turns out to be the Ancient method, with its much clearer

picture of the Ancient Hellenes and their honest, sensitive, and sensible multicultural relations, especially with Egypt.²⁷

The Way from Hellas to the Nile

In Homer, the eldest eponymous poet and educator of all the historical Hellenes, we find references to African peoples.²⁸ For instance, making use of poetic license, Homer claims that, when the Olympian Gods were fed up with the follies and constant quarrels of the restless residents of Achaia (Ancient Hellas), they would depart from Hellenic Olympus²⁹ for Ethiopia and the African mountains where they would enjoy peace. Thus, we read in the opening scene of the *Odyssey*, that absent from the meeting of the Gods, which would determine the fate of Odysseus and his long homecoming, was Poseidon, the great God of the sea and adversary of the Homeric hero, for the following reason:

Poseidon, however, was now gone on a visit to the distant Ethiopians, the farthest outposts of mankind, half of whom live where the Sun goes down, and half where he rises. He had gone to accept a sacrifice of bulls and rams, and there he sat and enjoyed the pleasures of the feast.³⁰

Later on in the story, when Odysseus had already reached Ithaca in disguise, he told the loyal Eumaeus of the adventure of a Cretan Prince, who had gathered a company and sailed for nearby Egypt:

On the fifth day we reached the great river of Egypt, and there in the Nile I brought my curved ships to. And now I ordered my good men to stay by the ships on guard while I sent out some scouts to reconnoitre from the heights. But these ran amuck and in a trice, carried away by their own violence, they plundered some of the fine Egyptian farms, bore off women and children and killed the men. The hue and cry soon reached the city, and the townsfolk, roused by the alarm, turned out at dawn. The whole place was filled with infantry and chariots and the glint of arms. Zeus the Thunderer struck abject panic into my party. Not a man had the spirit to stand up to the enemy, for we were threatened on all sides. They ended by cutting down a large part of my force and carrying off the survivors to work for them as slaves. As for myself, a sudden inspiration saved me—though I still wish I had faced my destiny and fallen there in Egypt ... I passed seven years in the country and made a fortune out of the Egyptians, who were liberal with me, one and all. But in the course of the eighth, I fell in with a rascally Phoenician, a thieving knave who had already done a deal of mischief in the world. I was prevailed upon by this specious rogue to join him in a voyage to Phoenicia, where he had a house and estate; and there I stayed with him for a whole twelvemonth. But when the days and months had mounted up, and the second year began its round of seasons, he put me on board for Libya, on the pretext of wanting my help with the cargo he was carrying, but really in order that he might sell me for a handsome sum when he got there. Full of suspicion but having no choice I followed him on board. With a good

stiff breeze from the north the ship took the central route and ran down the lee side of Crete. But Zeus had their end in store for them.³¹

This is a revealing story. To the audience of Homer, the fine farms of the Egyptians, the easy way of getting there, their generosity and nobility, in comparison with the thieving Phoenician and the greedy Cretan, must have been all too familiar. However, the disguised as a Cretan Prince Odysseus was not the only Homeric hero who allegedly visited Egypt. More persistent is the legend that Helen, the beautiful daughter of Zeus and the poetic cause of the Trojan War, had spent some romantic and memorable moments in that distant land, as a guest of the King and Queen of Egypt. The visit occurred either in her escape with Paris from Sparta or, more likely, in her return from Troy to Sparta in the ship of Menelaus.³² In either case Helen, as poetically portrayed by Homer, had fond memories of her alleged visit to Egypt. She had presumably received precious gifts from her Egyptian royal friends and, more to the point, she had picked up some pieces of precious “Egyptian wisdom,” regarding medicine and potent drugs. Consider the following episode as an example of such medical knowledge:

Helen, meanwhile, the child of Zeus, had a happy thought. Into the bowl in which their wine was mixed, she slipped a drug that had the power of robbing grief and anger of their sting and banishing all painful memories. No one that swallowed this dissolved in wine could shed a single tear that day, even for the death of his mother and father, or if they put his own son to the sword and he were there to see it done. This powerful anodyne was one of many useful drugs, which had been given to the daughter of Zeus by an Egyptian lady, Polydamna, the wife of Thon. For the fertile soil of Egypt is most rich in herbs, many of which are wholesome in solution, though many are poisonous. And in medical knowledge the Egyptian leaves the rest of the world behind. He is a true son of Paieon the Healer.³³

We should heed the last remarks of Homer, in praise of Egyptian “medical knowledge,” because it will help us later to properly evaluate the view held by certain Modern European scholars concerning the origins of science, including medicine, and philosophy. Homer may have been the first eponymous poet of Hellas to make poetic use of Helen’s legendary visit to Egypt, but he was by no means the last. For besides Homer, Euripides poetically exploited Helen’s visit to Egypt and her dealing with potent drugs in a hilarious tragicomedy, which bears her beautiful name, *Helen*:³⁴

These are the waters of the Nile, stream of sweet nymphs.
The river, fed with melting of pale snows, and not
with rain, rises to flood the flats of Egypt. Here
Proteus, while yet he lived, was lord over the land,
at home in Pharos, king in Egypt; and his bride
was Psamathe, one of the daughters of the deep,
wife once of Aeacus, later sundered from him ...

Nor is my own country obscure. It is a place called Sparta, and my father was Tyndareus: though they tell a story about how Zeus took on himself the shape of a flying swan, with eagle in pursuit, and came on wings to Leda my mother, and so won the act of love by treachery. It may be so. They called me Helen. Let me tell you all the truth of what has happened to me. The three goddesses came to remote Ida, and to Paris, for him to judge their loveliness, and beauty was the cause ... Because of me, beside the waters of Scamander, lives were lost in numbers; and the ever patient I am cursed by all and thought to have betrayed my lord and for the Hellenes lit the flame of a great war. Why do I go on living, then? Yet I have heard from the god Hermes that I yet shall make my home in the famous plain of Sparta with my lord, and he shall know I never went to Ilium, had no thought of bed with any man. Here, while yet Proteus looked upon this sun we see, I was safe from marriage. Now ... Thus, though I wear the name of guilt in Greece, yet here I keep my body uncontaminated by disgrace ...³⁵

But it is time for us now to turn from the poets and their creative imagination to historians and their “matter of fact” and sober reasoning about the world of politics, diplomacy, and war. Not surprisingly, we find in the two greatest historians of Hellas, Herodotus and Thucydides, only admiration and praise for the civilized Egyptians and what they had to teach the Ancient Hellenes, who were their only allies against the common enemy, the powerful Persian Empire.³⁶ A few passages from their works will clearly show the close historical relations between the Hellenes and the Egyptians from the seventh century onward.³⁷ That is, one hundred years before the conventional beginning of Hellenic philosophy in the sixth century BC with Thales.³⁸ For Herodotus, the cooperation of the Ionian Greeks and the Egyptians began in the time of the reign of Psamitichus I, as a result of a raid similar to the one described above:

Psamitichus I gained control of the whole country from Sais by the help of Ionian and Carian sea-raiders who were by bad weather to land on the Egyptian coast ... He [granted them two pieces of land in the Delta and much gold and silver] even went so far as to put some Egyptian boys in their charge to be taught Greek; and their learning of the language was the origin of the class of Egyptian interpreters. The tracts of land where the Ionians and Carians settled, and where they lived for many years, lie a little distance seaward from Bubastis, on the Pelusian mouth of the Nile. Amasis subsequently turned them out and brought them to Memphis, to protect him from his own people. They were the first foreigners to live in Egypt, and after their original

settlement there, the Greeks began regular intercourse with the Egyptians so that we have accurate knowledge of Egyptian History of the time of Psamitichus onward.³⁹

Under King Amasis (568-526 BC), identified by Herodotus as “a friend of the Hellenes,”⁴⁰ the relations between the Hellenes and the Egyptians became even more cordial as the threat of the Persian menace moved westwards and came closer to them both.⁴¹ The King went so far as to marry Ladice, a Princess of Cyrene (a Hellenic *polis* in Northern Africa).⁴² But after Amasis’ death, Egypt was conquered by the Persian King Cambyses and became a province of his immense Empire.⁴³ So did the Ionian Greek city-states less than a generation later in 494 BC. The famed battles of Marathon and Salamis saved the freedom of the Hellenes in mainland Hellas, while it raised the hopes of the Egyptians for regaining their lost freedom. Thus, inspired by Inaros, son of the above-mentioned Psamitichus, the Egyptians rebelled against the Persian tyranny. They asked their friends and freedom loving Hellenes, especially the Athenians, for help. The response was positive and prompt. Thucydides describes the event in the following manner:

After taking over power himself, Inaros called in the Athenians to help him ... They came to Egypt and sailed from the sea up the Nile. They gained control of the river and of the two thirds of Memphis, and then attempted to subdue the remaining third, which was called the White Castle and inside which were the Persians and Medes who had escaped and those Egyptians who had not joined the revolt ... Meanwhile the Athenian and the allied force in Egypt was still engaged and suffered all the chances and changes of war. At first the Athenians were masters of Egypt, and the king sent to Sparta a Persian named Megabazus with money to bribe the Spartans to invade Attica and so force the Athenians to recall their fleet from Egypt ... Here [at the Medesian mouth] the Athenians were under attack from the land by the Persians and from the sea by the Phoenician fleet. Most of the ships were lost, though a few managed to escape. This was the end of the great expedition against Egypt made by the Athenians and their allies. (I, 96-99)⁴⁴

Historically speaking, then, it is well documented that the Hellenes and their Egyptian allies, facing a common danger in the Persian expansion, developed close cultural bonds and relations. This began in the seventh century and continued until, three centuries later, a great son of Hellas, Alexander the Great, succeeded in uniting the Hellenes and in leading them victoriously against the Persians. He dissolved the Persian Empire and liberated both the Hellenes of Asia Minor and the Egyptians, who welcomed him as their savior sent by the Gods, calling him the son of Ammon (a synonym of Zeus).⁴⁵ Apparently with the intention of stressing the common cultural bonds between the two friendly nations,⁴⁶ Alexander built the Alexandria on the Nile. This Hellenistic *polis* was destined to become the great melting pot that fused together many cultures, especially the Hellenic and the Egyptian cultures for a millennium.⁴⁷

A new world-order was born from Alexander's victories, known as the Hellenistic era (in distinction to Hellenic). One of the great political and cultural centers of the new era was the city of Alexandria, with its racial mixture and great cultural diversity. In this way the world was prepared for the birth of a cosmopolitan religion. It is no accident that Christianity (Eastern Orthodox Christianity especially, with its rich ritual, mystical spirituality, and a sophisticated Trinitarian Theology) was born and matured mainly in Alexandria. But in the same great city were also born some of the most potent Christian heresies. By challenging the authority of the Christian Church and its Orthodoxy, these heresies prepared the way for the coming of a new heretical religion, the strictly monotheistic and even more militant Islam.⁴⁸

This being the case, it would seem that the scholars who doubt the possibility that some Hellenic philosophers (Thales, Pythagoras, Democritus, Plato, Eudoxus, and so on) could have visited Egypt and learned something there, as the ancient Hellenic tradition insists that they did,⁴⁹ do not stand on firm ground. Nor do those fare any better who, for whatever reasons, seem to want to downplay the possible influence that the civilized Egyptians might have had on the intelligent Hellenes, who paid then a visit and asked many questions, as Herodotus did later on and reported extensively on his experience.⁵⁰ Language could not have been a serious barrier because, by that time, the separate class of interpreters was numerous and ubiquitous, as we saw.⁵¹

In this sense, the great Egyptian god Thon or Theuth⁵² had been generous to his people since, according to the Platonic Socrates: "He it was that invented number and calculation, geometry and astronomy, not to speak of draughts and dice, and above all writing."⁵³ Let this, then, suffice about the historical and poetic evidence regarding the multiple connections of ancient *Hellas* with *Aigyptos*.

The Origin of Hellenic Philosophy

Wonder and curiosity, love of learning and critical questioning, and above all leisure for free intellectual pursuits and amicable discourse are characteristics associated with genuine *philosophia*, as practiced and understood by the Ancient Hellenes. Plato and Aristotle, whose works mark the apex of Hellenic philosophy and, more importantly, whose writings have been preserved, agree on this essential point, although they respectfully disagree on other points of philosophic doctrine. For them, human wonder (*thaumazein*) is "the origin of philosophy" and the art of philosophizing.⁵⁴

Accordingly, the beginning of what the Hellenes would consider as philosophy can go as far back as the appearance of *Homo Sapiens* on Mother Earth. For in order to satisfy an inborn curiosity and a very deep desire for enlightenment, human beings began to philosophize, that is, to acquire knowledge by questioning, distinguishing, comparing, and classifying things according to certain criteria. This

knowledge was not only practical and useful, as it would have to be at the beginning, but also theoretical and for its own sake as time went on. But, for this kind of activity to be fruitful or even possible, a leisurely type of existence must have been secured for at least some people. They could, then, be allowed and even encouraged to spend time in thinking and discussing the problems of the natural cosmos and of human life in settled and politically organized communities.⁵⁵

I will, therefore, allow first Plato and then Aristotle to speak for themselves on the question of origin/s of philosophy, the preconditions of its coming into being and its flourishing, and more significantly the possibility of its practice outside of Hellas, before the sixth century BC. To begin with, then, let us consider a dialogue between Socrates and his friend Theaetetus, which addresses clearly the first of these questions:

I could give you countless other examples, if you are to accept these. For I think you follow me Theaetetus; I fancy, at any rate, such puzzles are not altogether strange to you.

No, indeed it is extraordinary how they set me wondering whatever they can mean. Sometimes I get quite dizzy with thinking of them.

That shows that Theodorus was not wrong in his estimate of your nature. This sense of wonder is the mark of the philosopher. Philosophy indeed has no other origin, and he was a good genealogist who made Iris the daughter of Thaumas ... Then just take a look around and make sure that none of the uninitiated overhears us. I mean by uninitiated the people who believe that nothing is real save what they can grasp with their hands and do not admit that actions and processes or anything invisible can count as real.

They sound like a very hard and repellent sort of people.

It is true they are remarkably crude. The others, into whose secrets I am going to initiate you, are much more refined and subtle. Their first principle, on which all that we said just now depends, is that the universe really is motion and nothing else.⁵⁶

Thaumas or Thamus, mentioned by the Platonic Socrates here, is the same Egyptian king, to whom the wise Theuth (identified with the Hellenic Hermes) presented the invented arts and sciences, including the art of writing. Theuth/Hermes considered these arts as a remedy to memory and an inexhaustible source of wisdom for man. The King disagreed. To refresh our recollection, let us quote from *Phaedrus*:

Socrates: Very well. The story is that in the region of Naucratis in Egypt there dwelt one of the old gods of the country, the god to whom the bird called Ibis is sacred, his own name being Theuth. He it was that invented number and calculation, geometry and astronomy, not to speak of draughts and dice, and above all writing. Now the king of the whole country at that time was Thamus, who dwelt in the great city of Upper Egypt, which the Greeks call Egyptian Thebes, while Thamus they call Ammon. To him came Theuth and revealed his arts, saying that they ought to be passed on to the Egyptians in general. Thamus asked what was the use of them all, and when Theuth explained, he condemned what he thought the bad points and praised what he thought the good. On

each art, we are told, Thamus had plenty of views both for and against; it would take too long to give them in detail. But when it came to writing Theuth said, “Here, O king, is a branch of learning that will make the people of Egypt wiser and improve their memories; my discovery provides a recipe for memory and wisdom.” But the king answered and said, “O man full of arts, to one it is given to create the things of art, and to another to judge what measure of harm and of profit they have for those that shall employ them.”⁵⁷

One may wish to compare this story to that of the *Philebus*, where the Platonic Socrates again applies the theory of “the limit and the unlimited” to number and sound, stressing the importance of the “intermediate.” Again he refers, significantly, to the Egyptians through their wise Theuth or Hermes:

Socrates: I will do so, but first a small additional point to what I have been saying. When you have got your “one” you remember, whatever it may be, you must not immediately turn your eyes to the unlimited, but to a number; now the same applies when it is the unlimited that you are compelled to start with. You must not immediately turn your eyes to the one, but must discern this or that number embracing the multitude, whatever it may be; reaching the one must be the last step of all. We might take our letters again to illustrate what I mean now.

Protarchus: How so?

Socrates: The unlimited variety of sound was once discerned by some god, or perhaps godlike man; you know the story that there was some such person in Egypt called Theuth. He it was who originally discerned the existence, in that unlimited variety, of the vowels—not “vowel” in the singular but “vowels” in the plural—and then of other things which, though they could not be called articulate sounds, yet were noises of a kind. There were a number of them too, not just one, and a third class he discriminated what we now call the mutes.⁵⁸

These interesting comments on the “one” and the “many” coming so brilliantly from the mind of the Platonic Socrates can easily entice us into deep Parmenidean meditations. But, let us interrupt, at this point, the Socratic dialogue and turn to Aristotle’s more sober way of making essentially the same point, that “human wonder” (*thaumazein*, same root as in *Thaumas*, the Egyptian King/God) is the origin of philosophy, the love of wisdom. What may be a surprise to some is that Aristotle clearly connects this “wonder” and the prerequisite “leisure” with Egypt:

That philosophy is not a science of production is clear even from the history of the earliest philosophers. For it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize; they wondered originally at the obvious difficulties, then advanced little by little and stated difficulties about the greatest matters, for example, about the phenomena of the moon and those of the sun and of the stars, and about the genesis of the universe. And a man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant (whence even the lover of myth is in a sense a lover of wisdom, for the myth is composed of wonders).⁵⁹

And again:

But as more arts were invented, and some were directed to the necessities of life, others to recreation, the inventors of the latter were naturally always regarded as wiser, because their branches of knowledge did not aim at utility. Hence when all such inventions were already established, the sciences which do not aim to give pleasure or at necessities of life were discovered, and first in the places where men first began to have leisure. This is why the mathematical arts were founded in Egypt; for there the priestly caste was allowed to be at leisure.⁶⁰

This is a remarkable text. Aristotle's judgment is sound and clearly stated here.⁶¹ Furthermore, it corroborates Plato's view that the arts of writing, number, and music were inventions of the wise Egyptian Theuth for the benefit of mankind.⁶² It would be helpful, therefore, for a more integrated view of the matter, if we were to move now away from metaphysical considerations and toward more practical affairs, such as the best organization of the state.

Not surprisingly both Plato and Aristotle are, in contrast to Modern Europeans, consistent in crediting the Egyptians, respectively, with the kind of institutional stability and the division of labor, which each of them recommended as necessary for the wellbeing of the citizens of the well-ordered Hellenic *polis*. For instance, Plato's Athenian legislator praised the Egyptians for their wisdom to perceive the educational power of music, which they regulated for the benefit of their children and their state:

Athenian: Then is it conceivable that anywhere where there are, or may hereafter be, sound laws in force touching this educative-playful function of the Muses, men of poetic gifts should be free to take whatever in the way of rhythm, melody, or diction tickles the composer's fancy in the act of composition and teach it through the choirs to the boys and lads of a law-respecting society leaving it to chance whether the result prove virtue or vice?

Clinias: To be sure that does not sound rational, decidedly not.

Athenian: And yet this is precisely what they are actually left free to do, I may say, in every community with the exception of Egypt.

Clinias: And in Egypt itself, now—pray how has the law regulated the matter there?

Athenian: The mere report will surprise you. That nation, it would seem, long enough ago recognized the truth we are now affirming, that poses and melodies must be good, if they are to be habitually practiced by the youthful generation of citizens. So they drew up the inventory of all the standard types, and consecrated specimens of them in their temples. Painters and practitioners of other arts of design were forbidden to innovate on these models or entertain any but the traditional standards, and the prohibition still persists, both for these arts and for music in all its branches. If you inspect their paintings and reliefs on the spot, you will find that the work of ten thousand years ago—I mean the expression not loosely but in all precision—is neither better nor worse than that of today; both exhibit an identical artistry.

Clinias: A most amazing state of things!

Athenian: Or rather one immensely to the credit of their legislators and statesmen. No doubt one could find grounds for censure in other Egyptian institutions, but in this matter of music, at least, it is a fact, and a thought-provoking fact, that it has actually proved possible, in such a sphere, to canonize melodies which exhibit an intrinsic rightness by law. That must have been the doing of a god, or a godlike man—as in fact, the local tradition is that the melodies which have been preserved for so many ages were the work of Isis.⁶³

One may read this passage as a paradigmatic case of Athenian subtle irony or of Platonic unmitigated conservatism. But, in my view, the philosopher should be praised both for his ability to see the importance of the Egyptian legislation on the matter of music and the respect he had for their legislators. From them perhaps he learned valuable lessons not only about the dangers of irrational experimentation in education, but also about the organization of the best possible state as a whole for the common political good.

With regard to the latter, Aristotle also is very explicit that the political philosophers at that time were looking to Egypt for enlightenment and discovering there some useful and important political lessons. Let us, therefore, listen carefully to his informed comments and take note of what the Hellenic philosopher has to say in this regard, because it will help us understand and appreciate better the vast gap which separates the classical Hellenic perspective from the biased Modern European perspective. Besides, Aristotle, unlike Plato, did not display a taste for irony in his serious writings, and can hardly be accused of political conservatism in comparison with his teacher. Consider this:

It appears that it is not new, nor has it recently become known to⁶⁴ political philosophers that the state ought to be divided into classes, and that the warriors should be separated from the husbandmen. The system has continued in Egypt and in Crete to this day, and was established, as tradition says, by a law of Sesostrius in Egypt and of Minos in Crete ...⁶⁵ From this part of the world came the institution of common tables; the separation into castes from Egypt, for the reign of Sesostrius is of far greater antiquity than that of Minos.⁶⁶ It is true indeed that these and many other things have been invented several times over in the course of ages, or rather times without number; for necessity may be supposed to have taught men the inventions which were absolutely required, and when these were provided, it was natural that other things which would adorn and enrich life should grow up by degrees. And we may infer that in political institutions the same rule holds. Egypt witnesses to the antiquity of all these things, for the Egyptians appear to be of all people the most ancient; and they have laws and a regular constitution existing from time immemorable. We should therefore make the best use of what has been already discovered, and try to supply defect.⁶⁷

In this revealing passage Aristotle makes several important points, which are indicative of the Hellenic mind and method of approaching the problem of the origin/s of philosophy, science, and civilization. It contrasts sharply with the method of the European scholars, whose views will be discussed in the next

section. First of all, Aristotle allows for the possibility that the same or similar political institutions may have been invented many times over, given the immensity of ages past. Secondly, he acknowledges the antiquity and civility of Egypt as a constitutionally organized state with a division of labor and a social order, which are factors of stability. They are, therefore, worthy of imitation by other civilized people, especially the Hellenes, whose love of excessive liberty was paid for by the tragedy of constant strife and civil war. Thirdly, he frankly admits that this method of inquiry permits one to appraise what has been “already discovered,” which should be adopted without fear or shame, as well as what may be in need of improvement by further human activity.⁶⁸

To corroborate what Aristotle and Plato have written about the Egyptians and their political institutions and practices as models for the Hellenes, I would also like to mention at this point another great name of Classical Hellas, Isocrates, not to be confused with Socrates. Although he is not mentioned in the histories of philosophy, this Athenian teacher of rhetoric considered himself a philosopher, who was interested in rational discourse and in addressing political problems in a practical manner by avoiding eristic triviality, sophistic trickery, and metaphysical oddity.

Isocrates was certainly one of very few sensible and sensitive men of letters, who saw in a pan-Hellenic union the solution to the problem of constant civil war.⁶⁹ If the Hellenes had to fight someone, Isocrates advised them to defend Hellenism against “the barbarians.” By this he meant exclusively the Persians, who had been harassing the Hellenic city-states of Asia Minor. But if the Hellenes were to fight the great power of Persia successfully, in Isocrates’ view, they should ally with the Egyptians, with whom they shared not only common political interests, but also important common cultural bonds.

We should keep in mind these complex political considerations, as we read Isocrates’ praise of the legendary Busiris and, through him, the solid wisdom of the Egyptians. However, what he said is interesting and important for understanding the cultural link between the Hellenes and the Egyptians, because it accords well with the recorded views of the other two great Hellenic philosophers, Plato and Aristotle. So, let us listen to Isocrates’ perceptive and sensitive speech on practical wisdom:

So Busiris thus began, as wise men should, by occupying the fairest country and also by finding sustenance sufficient for his subjects. After-words, he divided them into classes: some he appointed to priestly services, others he turned to the arts and crafts, and others he forced to practice the arts of war. He judged that, while necessities and superfluous products must be provided by the land and the arts, the safest means of protecting these was practice in warfare and reverence for the gods. Including in all classes the right numbers for the best administration of the commonwealth, he gave orders that the same individuals should always engage in the same pursuits, because he knew that those who continually change their occupation never achieve proficiency in even a single one of their tasks, whereas those who apply themselves constantly to the

same activities perform each thing they do surpassingly well. Hence we shall find that in the arts the Egyptians surpass those who work at the same skilled occupations elsewhere more than artisans in general excel the laymen; also with respect to the system which enables them to preserve royalty and their political institutions in general, they have been so successful that philosophers who undertake to discuss such topics and have won the greatest reputation prefer above all others the Egyptian form of government, and that the Lacedaemonians, on the other hand, govern their own city in admirable fashion because they imitate certain of the Egyptian customs ... But the Lacedaemonians have made so much worse use of these institutions that all of them, being professional soldiers, claim the right to seize by force the property of everybody else, whereas the Egyptians live as people should who neither neglect their own possessions, nor plot how they may acquire the property of others. The difference in the aims of the two polities may be seen from the following: if we all imitate the sloth and greed of the Lacedaemonians, we should straightway perish through both the lack of the necessities of daily life and civil war; but if we should wish to adopt the laws of the Egyptians which prescribe that some must work and that the rest must protect the property of the workers, we should all possess our own goods and pass our days in happiness.⁷⁰

So much about the Egyptian practical “wisdom” manifested in the organization of the state, which had attracted the attention even of Hellenic political philosophers, as Isocrates observed. It had also found rather immature imitators in the Spartans who, in his opinion, perverted the meaning of “the art of war” and, instead of using it defensively to protect their own country and liberty, they used it aggressively against other people and their property. The Egyptians also excelled in “piety” (*eusebeia*) and in “practical wisdom” (*phronesis*), which was closer to his heart and found many Hellenic imitators including the philosopher Pythagoras of Samos:

Furthermore, the cultivation of practical wisdom may also reasonably be attributed to Busiris. For example, he saw to it that from the revenue of the sacrifices the priests should acquire affluence, but self-control through the purifications prescribed by the laws, and leisure by exemption from the hazards of fighting and from all work.⁷¹ And the priests, because they enjoyed such conditions of life, discovered for the body the aid which the medical art affords, not that which uses dangerous drugs, but drugs that are harmless as daily food, yet in their effects are so beneficial that all men agree that the Egyptians enjoy the best health and longevity;⁷² and then for the soul they introduced philosophy’s training,⁷³ a pursuit which has the power, not only to establish laws but also to investigate the nature of the universe. The older men Busiris appointed to have charge of the most important matters, but the younger he persuaded to forgo all pleasures and to devote themselves to the study of the stars, to arithmetic, and to geometry; the value of these sciences some praise for their utility in certain ways, while others attempt to demonstrate that they are conducive in the highest measure to the attainment of virtue ...⁷⁴ One might cite many admirable instances of the piety of the Egyptians, that piety which I am neither the first nor the only to have observed; on the contrary, many contemporaries and predecessors have remarked it, of whom Pythagoras

of Samos is one. On a visit to Egypt he became a student of the religion of the people, and was first to bring to the Greeks all philosophy ...⁷⁵

Evidently and reasonably, Isocrates concurs with Aristotle that leisure is the prerequisite for the development of science and philosophy, both of which he associates with Egypt originally. He agrees with the Platonic Socrates also regarding the importance of the division of labor politically, and the study of higher mathematics philosophically (that is, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy). All this he refers to the wise Egyptians, with whom Pythagoras had allegedly studied. Finally he reiterates Homer's judgment regarding the cultivation of the medical art, in which the Ancient Egyptians had excelled, providing thus a model for the Ancient Hellenes to follow wisely in the centuries to come.

These are the facts, as reported by the Ancient Hellenes in their writings, regarding the way in which the Hellenic philosophers saw themselves and their relations to the civilized Egyptians. One would reasonably expect that the scholarship and "historiography" of Ancient Hellenic philosophy, as practiced by the scientific European historians would reflect these facts. But this is not the case, as we will see next, when the views of two influential European historians of Ancient Philosophy, Jaeger and Guthrie, will be examined.⁷⁶ The contrast between the views of the Hellenic philosophers and the Modern European historians of philosophy, as well as the manner in which they expressed their respective views, are indeed very striking.⁷⁷

Modern Europeans vs. Ancient Hellenes

The two renowned scholars, Jaeger and Guthrie, are typical representatives of European scholarship. They have expressed opinions about the Ancient Hellenes and their relationship to the non-Hellenic peoples, which are rather astonishing. Their views on culture and civilization, and their dogmatic assertions about the origins of science and philosophy, are strangely contrary to the views of the (ostensibly admired) Ancient Hellenes. This fact may make one wonder about the possible causes and motives of such discrepancy between the Ancient Hellenes and the Modern Europeans. But it will be left to the readers to judge intelligently this culturally sensitive matter. Consider first the views expressed by Jaeger in the following passage, and compare them to those discussed in the previous section:

The history of ancient Egypt, which is reckoned not in centuries but in millennia, is marked by a dreadful rigidity, which is almost fossilization. But among the Romans also, political and social stability was the highest good, and innovations were little desired or needed. Greece is in a special category. From the point of view of the present day, the Greeks constitute a fundamental advance on the great peoples of the Orient, a new stage in the development of society. They established an entirely new set of principles for communal life. However highly we may value the artistic, religious, and

political achievements of earlier nations, the history of what we truly call civilization⁷⁸—the deliberate pursuit of an Ideal—does not begin until Greece ...⁷⁹ In this vague and analogical sense it is possible to talk of Chinese, Indian, Babylonian, Jewish or Egyptian culture, although none of these nations has a word or an idea which corresponds to real culture.⁸⁰

Thus spoke Werner Jaeger, who dominated classical studies in the first half of the twentieth century, about culture and civilization. Most striking in the above statement is Jaeger's facility to pass from the reasonable judgment that Hellenic culture represents a new development on the historical scene, with which most people would agree, to the irrational assertion that African, Asian and Semitic peoples had no civilization and no "real culture."⁸¹ Even the admired Ancient Hellenes are only temporarily spared. For, we are told subsequently, that they were to be surpassed by the so-called "Hellenocentric nations" of North Europe, especially the Germans.⁸²

As the instruments of "the Spirit," the European Nations were chosen by the Christian God (of Semitic roots) to advance to new peaks of higher culture expressed by Lutheran Reformation first, and German Idealism and Romanticism later.⁸³ In spite of all the apparent praise and glorification of the Ancient Hellenes and the strenuous efforts to imitate the Hellenic artistic and intellectual achievements, the Northern Europeans cannot hide the feeling, felt deep in their hearts, that they do not feel at home in the lands of classical Hellas. Jaeger himself seems to have realized this fact:

Of course each of the Hellenocentric nations feels that even Hellas and Rome are in some respects fundamentally alien to herself: the feeling is based partly on blood and sentiment, partly on organization and intellectual outlook, partly on historical distinctions. But there is a gigantic difference between that feeling and the sense of complete estrangement, which we have when we confront the Oriental nations, who are both racial and intellectually different from us; and it is undoubtedly a serious mistake in historical perspective to separate, as some modern writers do, the western nations from the Greeks and Romans by a barrier comparable to that which divides us from China, India and Egypt.⁸⁴

This strange statement sounds as an apocalyptic confession because it reveals clearly the typically Teutonic attitude towards other nations and races. The German intellectuals of Jaeger's time might do well to debate whether to place themselves at equal or unequal distance of alienation from the Hellenes and the Romans, as from the Chinese, the Indians, and the Egyptians. Moreover Jaeger might be right in insisting upon the differentiation of unequal degrees of alienation from the various ancient nations. But this peculiar Northern European academic debate cannot alter the probability that the Ancient Hellenes and their philosophers would have felt at home in the pluralistic, tolerant, and civilized societies of China, Egypt, and India. They would have certainly preferred to live there rather than in the

monolithic and intolerant societies of Medieval Northern Europe, under the double dominion of foxy Italian Popes and boorish German Emperors. The philosophic Hellenes would have probably felt even less at home in the religiously fanatical and “reformed” countries of the fragmented Europe, under the spiritual authority of philosophically unenlightened men.⁸⁵

Be that as it may, we should perhaps not have allowed Jaeger to distract us from our goal here, by raising such thorny questions as what constitutes culture or civilization and which nation or race has contributed more or less to its advancement. Yet, it would have been inconsiderate to overlook his unreasonable assertions without any comments at least for two reasons. Firstly, because they come from a man who is usually reasonable in his judgments and very knowledgeable about Hellenic history, arts, religion, science, and philosophy. Secondly, because his views about civilization and culture provide a suitable context to evaluate his views regarding the origin of philosophy, which is our theme here. So, when it comes to science and philosophy, not surprisingly, Jaeger makes the following claims:

Since Egypt and the Near Eastern countries were neighbors of Ionia, it is highly probable (and the probability is supported by sound tradition) that these older civilizations, through constant intellectual intercourse with the Ionians, influenced them not only to adopt their technical discoveries and skills in surveying, navigation, and astronomy, but also to penetrate the deeper problems to which the Egyptian and Oriental myths of creation and divinity gave answers far different from those of the Greeks ... But it was an innovation in the very principles of thought when the Ionians, assimilating and elaborating the empirical knowledge of the celestial and natural phenomena which they got from the Orient, used that knowledge independently to help them discover the origin and the nature of the universe; and when they subjected the myths dealing with the real and visible world, the myths of creation, to theoretical and causal inquiry. That is the true origin of scientific thought. That is the historical achievement of the Greeks ...⁸⁶

Compared with the previous quoted passages these assertions appear to be more balanced. Jaeger appears to acknowledge here what he was denying earlier, that is, that other peoples, besides the Ancient Hellenes and Modern European Protestants, had developed civilizations, and that they influenced the Hellenes beyond doubt. However, Jaeger insists that there is a fundamental difference, a difference in kind, if you prefer, not just in degree, which sets the Hellenic scientific achievements apart from all the Oriental and non-Hellenic accomplishments.⁸⁷

But if Jaeger is correct in his assessment of “the origin” of true science and philosophy, then the Ancient Hellenic philosophers must have been unaware of this alleged fact. For they believed, with Plato and Aristotle, that there has been not just one “origin” of scientific inquiry and philosophic speculation, but countless many, and that their own contribution was one of degree rather than one of kind.⁸⁸ For the Hellenes the emphasis was not on the primitive beginning but on the

perfection of any art or science.⁸⁹ Thus they were proud only in the sense that, whatever they received from others, they did their best to improve upon it in their unique and Hellenic way.⁹⁰

Turning now from Jaeger to Guthrie, we find here too the same reluctance to face the facts about the question of how the Hellenes saw their relation to other nations in terms of science and philosophy. If anything, his assertions are even more astonishing than Jaeger's. Consider, for example, the following passage and note his faulty reasoning. He suggests that the Egyptians could not possibly have influenced the Hellenes "philosophically" because they had no philosophy; and they did not have philosophy because they were naturally incapable of developing it, since they certainly lacked "the necessary spark," which the Hellenes possessed:

In the application of various techniques to the amelioration of the human life the Egyptians of a thousand years before could probably have taught these Greeks some useful lessons. Yet the torch of philosophy was not lit in Egypt, for they lacked the necessary spark which the Greeks possessed so strongly and embodied in their word *philosophia*.⁹¹

Occasionally, even Guthrie, like Jaeger, is prepared to make some concessions with regard to the sciences. Take for example the following statement: "Thousands of clay tablets provided material for an appreciation of the science and philosophy of the ancient Near East and hence for a balanced estimate of what it could have taught the Greeks." Also, "the debt of Greek mathematics to Egypt and Babylon was one which the Greeks themselves acknowledged."⁹² However, Guthrie does not hesitate, in the spirit of Jaeger, who had emphasized abstraction, generalization, formality, ideality, and universality, to make the inconsistent claim that follows:

The uniqueness of their own achievement lies elsewhere. We get a glimpse of it if we consider that although philosophy and science are as yet inseparable, yet, whereas we speak of Egyptian and Babylonian science, it is more natural to refer to the philosophy of the Greeks. Why is this? The Egyptian and Mesopotamian peoples, so far as we can discover, felt no interest in knowledge for its own sake, but only in so far as it served a practical purpose. (p. 34)⁹³

Now, if we were to ask how Guthrie, as a historian of Ancient Hellenic philosophy, would be able to reconcile his stated view with the contrary views held by both Aristotle and Plato, the answer would be that he would not even try. He simply thinks that they were wrong. Especially Aristotle is made the target here of Guthrie's attack for giving credit to the Egyptians for original contributions to science and philosophy, which they did not make. Consider his faulty argument in this regard:

Nevertheless Aristotle is too obviously advancing a favorite theory of his own, which he presses on many other occasions, and Herodotus' account of the practical limitations of Egyptian geometry remains the more probable. In holding that disinterested intellectual activity is a product of leisure, Aristotle is clearly right. His mistake lies in transferring to geometry in Egypt the character and the purpose that it had in fourth-century Athens, where it was part of a liberal education and also a subject of pure research. In Egypt it was the handmaid of land measuring or pyramid-building.⁹⁴

The one who is in error here is certainly not Aristotle, but Professor Guthrie. He is wrong in all the three points, which he makes in this statement: that geometry was not part of the liberal education in Egypt; that the Egyptians had no advanced research in the subject of mathematics; and that the fourth-century Athens enjoyed both of these advantages. As a matter of fact, a man who knew mathematics and the state of education in the fourth-century Athens, and cared about these matters deeply, has confessed that he felt ashamed of all this. That man was Plato himself. As an educated Athenian, he felt shame when he compared the state of Hellenic pedagogy and mathematics of his time with that of Egypt of "many centuries ago." I will allow Plato to argue against the historian Guthrie here and invite you to be the arbitrators on this:

Ath. Well, then, I maintain that the freeborn men should learn of these various subjects as much as in Egypt is taught to vast number of children along with their letters. To begin with, lessons have been devised there [in Egypt] in ciphering for the very children, which they can learn with a good deal of fun and amusement ... They then go on to exercise in measurements of length, surface, and cubical content, by which they dispel the native and general, but ludicrous and shameful, ignorance of mankind about the whole matter.⁹⁵

Cl. And in what way may this native ignorance consist?

Ath. My dear Clinias, when I was told, rather belatedly, about our condition in this matter, like you, I was astounded. Such ignorance seemed to me more worthy of a stupid beast like the hog than of a human being, and I blushed not for myself alone, but for the whole Hellenic world.

Cl. But what was the reason for your blushes? Let us have your account of it, Sir.

Ath. Why, so I will. Or rather I will make it plain by a question. Pray tell me one little thing. You know what is meant by *line*?... and *surface*?... and *volume*?...

Cl. Of course, I do.

Ath. And what of the relations of line and surface to volume, or of line and surface to one another? Is it not the fact that we Hellenes all imagine they are commensurable in some way or other?

Cl. Why certainly that is the fact.

Ath. Then if this is another impossibility, though we Hellenes as I said, all fancy it possible, are we not bound to blush for them all as we tell them, "Worthy Hellenes, here is one of the things of which we said the ignorance is a disgrace." (*Laws* 819b-820b)⁹⁶

In light of this passage and previous texts from Plato, Aristotle, Isocrates, Jaeger, Guthrie, and others, the contrast between Ancient Hellenic philosophers and Modern European historians of philosophy should be strikingly evident. Unlike the Europeans, the Ancient Hellenes appear to be more objective and more sympathetic to the Egyptians, so that we may call them phil-egyptian and the Egyptians phil-hellenic. As genuine lovers of wisdom and truth, the Hellenic philosophers particularly were prepared to credit the wise and civilized Egyptians with achievements in music, medicine, mathematics, politics, religion, and practical wisdom, which were equal, if not superior, to those of their contemporary fellow Hellenes. In other words, in every field the Ancient Egyptians provided the models, which the Ancient Hellenes were eager to imitate and try to surpass.

In stark contrast to this sensible approach, European philologists and historians of Hellenic philosophy of the remarkable caliber of Jaeger and Guthrie, surprisingly, appear unwilling to follow the same prudent path, as the Ancient Hellenes, on this important matter.⁹⁷ In so doing, they give the impression of being friendly to neither Egypt nor Hellas, in a different sense regarding the latter, which is more subtle and serious. For if their appraisals of the origin of science, philosophy, civilization were correct, then it would follow that the admired Ancient Hellenes (their philosophers included) did not know what they were doing, when they praised the Egyptians for achievements in these areas highly, frequently, and in writing. One is left to wonder whether these European scholars realized their inconsistency and the magnitude of the insult, which they commit, not only against the admired Hellenic philosophers, but also against the intelligence of all sincere students of philosophy.

In this respect, then, and for these specific reasons, the Northern European approach is shown to have been unfair to the Egyptians and insulting to the Hellenes. In spite of all the praise of their "Hellenic genius," which the Ancients philosophers ostensibly receive from their modern admirers, the European tactic and logic here does not seem to serve the love of wisdom and truth, as understood by the beloved Ancient Hellenes. Therefore, it must be rejected as incorrect and unacceptable to those who, like the Hellenes and the Egyptian friends, believe that "sweet is truth."⁹⁸

With these comments our discussion has reached its final goal. It remains now for us to draw the necessary conclusions from our analysis and discussion of the evidence presented. I would like to make some observations regarding the present state of affairs in the global order of things. I would also like to assess the potential role, which Hellenic philosophy may be called upon to play in the near future, in light of the unexpected reemergence of religious fanaticism of the two traditional enemies, that is, the fundamentalist faiths of militant Islam and messianic Christianity.

Conclusion

From our discussion at least three points should have become clear by now. First, we have seen through the provided historical evidence that the Ancient Hellenes had relatively easy access to the Mediterranean Egypt in the sixth and subsequent centuries, when the first Hellenic philosophers appeared in the horizon. Second, we have noticed that, as the newcomers on the historical scene, the Ancient Hellenes, especially the Hellenic philosophers, had much to learn from the civilized Egyptians. The Egyptian manifold wisdom, as expressed in their great achievements in the arts and sciences, in religion and medicine, in politics and law, the Hellenes quickly learned to admire and appreciate.⁹⁹ Third, we found that the Ancient Hellenes had good reason, drawn from their extensive experience, which justified their admiration of the Egyptian pedagogy, law, mathematics, medicine, and even their philosophic way of life in accordance with virtue and nature.

In different, but equally important, ways each of the Egyptian achievements appeared to have contributed to the ultimate cultural end of purifying the human soul and harmonizing it with the community and with the cosmos, so that it may become perfected to a maximum possible degree for mortal beings. It is perhaps no accident that this same noble goal is also found in the Hellenic tradition, as articulated in the Pythagorean and the Platonic schools of philosophy especially.¹⁰⁰

Consequently, it would be prudent for the students of Hellenic philosophy to spend their time discovering any specific lessons or methods, which the Hellenes perhaps learned from the Egyptians and the ways in which they improved upon them, instead of trying to prove the impossible, like Jaeger and Guthrie. These two wanted to persuade us, for no evident reason, that the Ancient Hellenes alone and unassisted not only perfected, but also invented, every science and art, including philosophy, the great queen of arts and sciences.¹⁰¹ In order to achieve such goal, the careful inquirer would do well to pay close attention to what the Hellenic philosophers actually said about their relations to their neighbors.

In this respect, it should be clear that our discussion has established at least this much: That Modern European historians of Ancient Hellenic philosophy are essentially unlike the Ancient Hellenic philosophers and historians of philosophy. The latter were generous in giving measured credit, for achievements in the arts, sciences, religion, politics, and law, to those who, like the Ancient Egyptians, clearly deserved it. For instance, it would be wise to read Porphyry, who is a reliable Ancient historian of Hellenic Philosophy, carefully. Students should take note of his report about the doctrines, which Pythagoras brought to Hellas from abroad. They include: "That the soul is immortal; that it changes into other kinds of living beings; also that events recur in certain cycles, and that nothing is ever absolutely new; and finally that all living things should be regarded as akin."¹⁰²

The doctrines of the immortality of the soul, the possibility of reincarnation, and the affinity of all life on earth, are very important philosophically and are echoed in some of the most advanced Platonic dialogues. But the most striking of

Porphiry's comments in this short passage, which seems pregnant with meaningful ancient wisdom, is that "nothing is ever absolutely new" in this world of ours with its cyclical history (in time and of time), as the Hellenic philosophers understood it. As Plato, Aristotle, and Isocrates have argued extensively, this good and sensible observation would apply to philosophy as well. For Hellenic minds, clearly philosophy could not have had one origin in time or space. Miletus and the sixth century BC are simply conventions.

Evidently, by the channel of Pythagorean tradition especially, some seeds and roots of Egyptian wisdom reached classical Hellas, where they grew into the magnificent tree of Platonism. When Platonism, centuries later (3rd-6th AD), was reborn as Neoplatonism in Alexandria, it branched out into Christian (or religious) and Hellenic (or philosophical) versions.¹⁰³ As we will see in the next chapter, it was unfortunate, not only for the history of Europe, but for our civilization also, that the religious version prevailed. However, the fact remains that, in the prolonged struggle between the two versions of Platonism for the hearts and minds of the ancient peoples (Greeks, Romans, Europeans, Africans, and Asians), philosophy lost the battle to religion.¹⁰⁴

Practicing monotheistic intolerance and theocratic despotism, particularly in Western and Northern Europe, the Popes managed to dominate European culture for the last two millennia.¹⁰⁵ In this qualified sense, it is correct to say that a general characterization of "European philosophy" would be, as A.N. Whitehead laconically put it, "a series of footnotes to Plato."¹⁰⁶ However, we should keep in mind that the Christianized Plato of Augustine to the extent that he was forced to serve the revealed dogmas of a theocratic religion, is different from the philosopher preserved in the Hellenic tradition, which was more philosophic, diverse, and tolerant.

In conclusion, it may be said that, for a perceptive student of the history of philosophy, the most profound crisis of our times cannot be the one associated with the collapse of the Soviet-style Socialism and the end of the Cold War, great as these events are in themselves. More serious is the other crisis, which pertains to the attempt to preserve the hegemony of European culture over the globe, and the dominance of the organized Church over Europe and the Western World using Platonic and Hellenic philosophy as "handmaids" of the Christian theocracy. This trend will inevitably antagonize and revitalize the fundamentalists of militant Islam. Thus, instead of moving forward to enlightenment, man will perhaps fall back again in the abyss of religious wars, fanaticism, and terrorism (as New York, Madrid, and London testify).

In view of this gloomy possibility, the time may be ripe for another rebirth of Platonism, hopefully more lasting and in its authentic Hellenic version this time.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, the friends of Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Porphyry, Proclus, Pletho, and all genuine Hellenic philosophers, should work together to prevent the lapsing of the World into "Dark Ages" again. On the contrary, they should resist religious fanaticism by the power of Hellenic *logos*. They should try

to shape the new millennium in the renewed spirit of philosophic diversity, tolerance, and democratic freedom for the common good of humanity and its fragile sanity.¹⁰⁸