raphy as a genre was its propagandistic, often polemical, mood. The biographies of Aristoxenus and Suetonius were often profound critiques of men who far from measuring up to an ideal exemplified its reverse. The philosophical, scholastic orientation of Aristoxenus was also a polemical device; he used biography as a weapon to further the cause of one school at the expense of others by making an individual philosopher the embodiment of the virtues, or vices, of his school. The conclusion that many of these biographies were written to sway, perhaps even create, opinion about certain political and philosophical principles is unavoidable.

The biographies to which we now turn exhibit the idealizing and propagandistic features of Graeco-Roman biography but with a crucial addition. They were involved in religious controversy and so attempted to sway not mere opinion but belief. We shall see that the nature of this struggle led to a new standard for biographical idealization, the "divine sage," a literary type that became a major influence on the portrayal of the character of philosophers in Late Antiquity.

CHAPTER TWO

Biography and Paradigms of the Divine Sage

Biographers of Late Antiquity thought divinity to be a distinguishing characteristic of the philosopher. This conviction can be viewed as an intensification of older philosophical notions of the extent to which men can be divine. Plato, for example, stated in *The Republic* that "the lover of wisdom, by keeping company with the divine and orderly, becomes himself divine and orderly in so far as it is possible for man," but he qualified this statement by adding that "there is much imbalance in all men." Any man who loves wisdom, then, is divine because his love places him in harmony with cosmic order; no man, however, is completely divine since we are all prey to human factiousness. Aristotle held a similar opinion. Writing about the life of contemplation, he remarked in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that consistent practice of such a life is beyond our mortal element: "for it is not in so far as he is man that he will live so, but in so far as something divine is present in him." Reason is divine, and the "activity of philosophic wisdom" is divine in comparison with ordinary human life.[1]

Six centuries later, the Neoplatonic philosopher Porphyry could speak of the philosopher as the "priest of the universal god."[2] Notions of what the philosophic life is, and who is capable of living it, had undergone a great change, such that the comments of Plato and Aristotle would have seemed gross understatements to their philosophical heirs, the intellectual elite of Porphyry's time. A more aristocratic idea had replaced their rather egalitarian thought that once apprised of the course of the truly virtuous life, all men could at least aspire toward philosophy, the one divine activity. For Porphyry's contemporaries, philosophy was a profession limited to a select

1. Plato *The Republic* 500c–d; Aristotle *Nicomachaean Ethics* 1177a–b.
2. Porphyry *De abstinentia* 2.49: "*ho tou epi pasin theou hiereus.*"

group, the teachers of the religious sects and of the philosophical circles, and dedicated to a single end, knowledge of god.

By the third century, there was no question that philosophy was an essentially religious endeavor. A passage from the Hermetic treatise *Asclepius* states the case succinctly: "Philosophy consists solely in learning to know the deity by habitual contemplation and pious devotion."[3] The practical, action-oriented life of the human community was denigrated: it was a "tragi-comedy," a "shadow of contemplation," an inferior mode of being.[4] Pagan and Christian alike subscribed to an ontological doctrine that defined the real as the degree of one's assimilation, through contemplation and other salvific acts, to the divine.[5] Though all men were thought to contain a divine spark—Sextus stated that to see God would be to see oneself[6]—only a few were sufficiently aware of it.[7] These latter were, of course, the sages, whose souls were "God's mirror."[8] As Porphyry remarked, the sage became divine by his likeness to God,[9] and his contemporaries looked to him as a spiritual doctor and moral guide.[10] The philosopher, then, was the man

3. *Asclepius* 12 (*Corpus Hermeticum* 2.312). See also Maximus of Tyre (*Diss.* 5.8) who states that philosophy is the only pure religion, and Apuleius (*De Dog. Plat.* 2.7) who identifies justice with holiness. Christians too considered philosophy to be identical to religion. Among the apologists, Melito of Sardis (in Eusebius *HE* 4.26), Athenagoras (*Supplicato pro Christianis* 2), and Justin (*Dialogue with Trypho* 2ff.) all regard Christianity as philosophy. Reading his own convictions into the past, Justin suggested that the vision of God was the true goal of Plato's philosophy, an opinion that came to be widely accepted among all philosophers, regardless of their sectarian affiliations (*Dialogue* 2.3–6). But the only true philosophy that alone could lead men back to God was, of course, Christianity (*Dialogue* 8.1, 2.1). Clement of Alexandria had a more complicated definition: on the one hand, true philosophy was the knowledge transmitted by Christ; on the other, Greek philosophy properly so called was simply a preparation for the perfection offered by life as a Christian (*Stromata* 1.18.90, 1.3.28). Eusebius used the term "philosophy" to mean both Christian doctrine and the ascetic life (*Praeparatio evangelica* 12.29). For further examples see Gustave Bardy, "'Philosophie' et 'philosophe' dans le vocabulaire chrétien des premiers siècles," *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 25 (April-December, 1949): 97–108.

4. Porphyry *Ad Marcellam* 2; Plotinus *Enn.* 3.8.4.

5. See, for example, Plotinus *Enn.* 1.2.6; Clement of Alexandria *Stromata* 6.113.3: human life should be directed toward becoming a god (realizing fully one's divine potential).

6. Sextus 446. 7. Plotinus *Enn.* 1.6.8. 8. Sextus 450.

9. Porphyry *Ad Marcellam* 285.20.

10. See, for example, Clement of Alexandria, who held that the person who had gained mastery over his desires was able to see God; being raised above the body, that person would be filled with the spirit and possess insight into the impetceptible world. Those who reach this height, "friends of God," become the counsellors and spiritual leaders of others (*Stromata*

who had an assured share in the divine kingdom;[11] he was free to take what Plotinus, quoting Homer, called true advice: "'Let us fly to our dear country,'" the realm of the soul.[12]

But the philosopher was not simply a passive figure, content to occupy a saintly periphery in ancient society. He was a man with a mission, a mission that was central to life in Late Antiquity: to communicate the divine, and to protect from the demonic. By the first century A.D., the philosopher—whether he was a roving preacher, a magician-prophet, or an acknowledged leader of a particular school of thought—had become a holy man in the eyes of his fellows, and his prestige was such that admirers were able to make extravagant claims for his abilities.[13] Indeed the *idea* of the holy man became at least as important as the men themselves, for their existence (or, perhaps, their reputations) attested to the gods' concern for the welfare of humankind.

The idea of the philosopher as holy man had a dramatic effect on biographical portrayals of philosophers in the Imperial age. The sage was, of course, a time-honored, traditional paradigm; and we have seen how earlier biographers developed certain literary techniques and modes of presentation that allowed them to concentrate on the ideals suggested by the actual lives of their subjects. In later biographies by such authors as Philostratus, Porphyry, Eusebius, and Iamblichus, the great wisdom and noble character of the philosopher are augmented, and sometimes overshadowed, by specific qualities and talents linking him to divinity. These "holy" embellishments on the image of the philosopher represent more than a simple application of a divine veneer, however; they signify a major shift in cultural values. This shift had several aspects: the flowering of heroic asceticism; the

6.102.2, 7.13.1, 8.19.2, 6.106.2, 7.3.4). Damis' praise of Apollonius is instructive here: "for when I first met with Apollonius here, he at once struck me as full of wisdom and cleverness and sobriety and of true endurance; but when I saw that he also had a good memory, and that he was very learned and entirely devoted to love of learning, he became to me something superhuman; and I came to the conclusion that if I stuck to him I should be held a wise man instead of an ignoramus and a dullard, and an educated man instead of a savage." Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* 3.43.

11. Sextus 311. For a wealth of examples, see Karl Holl, "Die schriftstellerische Form des Griechischen Heiligenlebens," *Neue Jahrbücher für klassische Altertum* 29 (1912): 414–18.

12. Plotinus *Enn.* 1.6.8.

13. On the claims of holy men, see the comment of Dio Chrysostom 33.4: "It seems to me that one often hears about divine men [*theiōn anthrōpōn*] who say that they know all things and speak about all things."

conflation (and confusion) of several modes of "philosophic" activity, including miracle- and magic working, prophecy, and the more usual business of superior intellection; and the wholesale allegiance of both pagans and Christians to the new holy personality cult.

The appearance of the divine philosopher also represents major changes on the literary scene: the biographical genre came to be closely associated with holy sages—so closely, in fact, that Lucian of Samosata chose a biographical framework within which to satirize holy men; biography helped create and promote the myth of the holy man and was not simply a vehicle for reporting idealistic embroiderings on historical lives; biography became an important tool, along with apology, in the proselytizing of Christians and pagans; and, finally, the special techniques that biography traditionally used to portray character were refined and, in a sense, "institutionalized"—in other words, biography now included certain necessary ingredients.

In this chapter, we will examine the new divine image of the philosopher and the cultural significance of the emergence and popularity of this figure. The chapter that follows will document in detail how the idea of the divine philosopher transformed, and was transformed by, biography.

The Character of the Holy Philosopher

The idea that wise men were somehow divine was not simply a figment of the biographers' imagination; nor was the mantle of holiness forced upon philosophers. There is some evidence that philosophers were not unwitting recipients of this new honor. Apollonius of Tyana, for example, was fully aware that other men considered him a god, and he himself believed that he was "superior to most men."[14] Origen, the great biblical exegete, implied that he possessed the grace of the mind of Christ when he stated that accurate scriptural interpretation demanded that grace.[15] Although these "intimations of immortality" on the part of the philosophers themselves are pale reflections of the opinions that their biographers recorded, they illustrate

14. Apollonius *Ep.* 44: "Other men regard me as the equal of the gods [*isotheon*] and some of them even as a god. . . . I am superior to most men, both in my language and in my character." It is important to note that the authenticity of Apollonius' letters is disputed. See Eduard Norden, *Agnostos Theos: Untersuchungen zur Formengeschichte Religiöser Rede* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1913), pp. 49–56, 94, 337–46.

15. Origen *De principiis* 4.2.3.

nevertheless the important point that conceptions of divinity differed. For some the claim of actual godhood could be made, while others were thought to occupy a more modest god*like* status.

There was in fact a complex battery of characteristics of the holy man from which biographers were free to choose: Morton Smith has remarked upon the veritable "mob of divine or deified men" known to Graeco-Roman antiquity.[16] Stories that were circulated and written down about heroes, demigods, magicians, prophets, healers, and the like provided a copious depository of traits that might signify divinity. It should be noted, however, that in this period the idea that men could be divine did not include absolute identification with the supreme god, whether he be Zeus, the Neoplatonic One, or the Christian God.[17] Pagans and Christians agreed that the supreme god was incorporeal, unchanging, and incapable of mixing with the material realm. Identification with this god was certainly an ideal. Plotinus reportedly achieved union with (or illumination by) the divine source four times during his life, and Origen, whom E. R. Dodds called a "mystic manqué," stated that "often, God is my witness, I have felt that the Bridegroom was approaching me and he was, as far as may be, with me; then he suddenly vanished, and I could not find what I was seeking."[18]

This ideal of identification with God was not, however, the factor usually operative in the divinification of philosophers. Much more common was the concern to demonstrate the extent of a man's assimilation to God, or how he was godlike. The traits selected to depict the philosopher's divine status became literary motifs, and biographers used various combinations of these motifs, depending upon the degree of divinity being claimed for the specific philosopher. Two basic types of divine philosopher—those who were said to be gods or sons of gods, and those who were godlike—were current in biographies in Late Antiquity. Before distinguishing between these two types in detail, however, I will draw a brief composite image of the biographers' vision of the divine philosopher in order to show which traits among the many available ones came to typify his character.

Chief among these characteristics is wisdom. Generally he is shown to

16. Smith, "Prolegomena to a Discussion of Aretalogies, Divine Men, the Gospels, and Jesus," *JBL* 90 (June 1971): 184.

17. C. H. Talbert, "The Concept of Immortals in Mediterranean Antiquity," *JBL* 94 (September, 1975): 419–21; Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970), pp. 118–19.

18. Porphyry *Vita Plotini* 23; see Plotinus *Enn.* 4.8.1. Origen *Hom. in Cant.* 1.7, quoted in Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, p. 98.

possess superior gifts of perception and understanding from a very early age. Origen, for example, understood the profundities of allegorical exegesis of scriptural texts "while still a boy" and applied himself with that "excessive zeal"[19] that was later to earn him the nickname "Adamantius."[20] Similar was the child Apollonius, who "showed great strength of memory and power of application" and soon surpassed his teacher.[21] This idea that the greatness of the man must have been already evident in the child was a popular biographical convention, stemming back to Xenophon, who used childhood and education as important features in his portrayal of Agesilaus' character. In portraits of divine philosophers, however, there is more than simply a hint of future grandeur in the child; rather, his wisdom is already fully developed. This may explain why the accounts of the young philosopher's education, which follow the revelation of his youthful sagacity, seem somewhat superfluous. The point of his education seems primarily to be a kind of discipline, the fine tuning of an already overpowering intelligence.[22] The child is immersed in studies both sacred and secular that are the foundation of the mature sage's philosophy. Philostratus' statement about Apollonius illustrates this point of view: "Apollonius however was like the young eagles who, as long as they are not fully fledged, fly alongside their parents and are trained by them in flight, but who, as soon as they are able to rise in the air, outsoar the parent birds."[23] But another episode in Apollonius' life runs counter to this statement and shows instead the philosopher's freedom from the need for conventional education. As Apollonius is about to depart for Babylon, his pupil Damis offers himself as a guide, claiming that his facility with languages will ease the sage's way. To this Apollonius replies, "I understand all languages, though I never learned a single one."[24] This is surely an unqualified affirmation of the philosopher's superhuman intelligence and stands in stark contrast to passages indicating the wise child's educational needs. Whatever the biographer's intentions, these ambiguous stories of the philosopher's education really serve to highlight the two sides of the philosopher's nature, which are sometimes difficult to reconcile: his superiority to other men, which is due in part to his

19. Eusebius *HE* 6.2.7–9.
20. Ibid., 6.14.10; Jerome *De vir. ill.* 54 and *Ep.* 33.4.11; Epiphanius *Heresies* 64.1.1; Photius *Library* 118.
21. Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* 1.7.
22. Iamblichus *Vita Pythagorica* 2.11–12; Eusebius *HE* 6.2.7–10.
23. Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* 1.7.
24. Ibid., 1.19.

great wisdom, and his humanity, which suggests that he must have passed through the various stages of life like other men.

Another feature of the divine sage's wisdom is his extraordinary insight into human nature. Pythagoras, for example, scrutinized potential disciples by refining the methods of physiognomy and was thereby able to perceive the dispositions of the candidates' souls.[25] Plotinus' perception was so acute that he was able to turn the magical attacks of a secret enemy back on the perpetrator.[26] Porphyry attributes to him a "surpassing degree of penetration into character,"[27] a talent from which Porphyry himself benefited, since Plotinus had at one time perceived his student's increasing desire for death and advised a rest, thus saving him from suicide.[28] The emphasis that biographers place on their heroes' wondrous insight is intended to point to divinity: a priest of Asclepius replies to Apollonius' careful Socratic questioning that it is just at this point that the gods excel men, "for the latter, because of their frailty, do not understand their own concerns, whereas the gods have the privilege of understanding the affairs of both men and themselves."[29] It is not therefore surprising to find that divine philosophers possess this talent.

The philosopher does not, however, use his talent simply to judge lesser men. He is credited with a real sympathy and concern for the welfare of his fellows. Origen's philanthropy placed him in a particularly dangerous position, and that may account in part for the fame he received as a result. He gave comfort and encouragement to Christian martyrs caught in the Alexandrian persecutions of the early third century. Since several of the martyrs had apparently been converted by Origen, he no doubt felt responsible for bolstering their courage to witness for their new-found faith, and he risked the fury of "the heathen multitude" to do so.[30] Pythagoras also took a personal interest in his disciples. He devised medicines and melodies that soothed the soul and administered these in the evening to promote "pleasing dreams" and in the morning to free his students from "nocturnal torpor."[31] Porphyry reports an extraordinary kindness of Plotinus: he agreed to take in the children of "many men and women on the approach of death" and to oversee their education and manage their property. His home must

25. Porphyry *Vita Pythagorae* 13; Iamblichus *Vita Pythagorica* 17.71.
26. Porphyry *Vita Plotini* 10.
27. Ibid., 11. Note the similar example of unmasking an evil character by Apollonius in Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* 1.10.
28. Porphyry *Vita Plotini* 11.
29. Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* 1.11.
30. Eusebius *HE* 6.3.1–6.
31. Iamblichus *Vita Pythagorica* 15.64–65.

have been an orphanage of sorts, yet it would be incorrect to picture Plotinus as a harried social worker, for Porphyry notes that "though he shielded so many from the worries and cares of ordinary life, he never, while awake, relaxed his intent concentration upon the intellect."[32]

A final, perhaps more prosaic, indication of the philosopher's wisdom is his desire to communicate it. Philosophers are teachers; divine philosophers are proselytizers, and their teaching not only touches but changes the lives of their disciples. Origen converted the heathen by his teaching, and was reportedly so successful in one case that the student, Heraclas, became bishop of Alexandria.[33] Eventually Origen had so many students in his course of "divine studies" that he had to abandon his instruction of secular literature. Describing his popularity, Eusebius notes that his students "did not give him time to breathe, for one batch of pupils after another kept frequenting from morn to night his lecture room."[34] Plotinus' persuasiveness as a teacher was so great that he converted several members of Roman officialdom to philosophy,[35] but this feat was far surpassed by Pythagoras, who once captured "more than two thousand men" by a single lecture and not only converted politicians but took on the legislative role himself, handing down laws to several Italian cities.[36] Origen remarked in his *Against Celsus* that the real defense of the holy man lies in the lives of his genuine disciples.[37] Biographers agreed that one of the important measures of a philosopher's stature was the quality and quantity of his disciples. The philosopher's holiness might be described as effusive, and biographies of divine philosophers give considerable attention to worthy heirs and imitators of the philosophical masters. One of Iamblichus' hyperboles illustrates this point well. He asserts that as a result of the studies that Pythagoras instituted, "all Italy was filled with philosophers."[38]

The biographers' conception of the divine philosopher and his circle of

32. Porphyry *Vita Plotini* 9.
33. Eusebius *HE* 6.3.2.
34. Ibid., 6.3.8, 6.15. See also 6.8.6: Origen "devoted his whole time untiringly to the divine studies and his pupils."
35. Porphyry *Vita Plotini* 7.
36. Porphyry *Vita Pythagorae* 20–22.
37. Origen *Contra Celsum* praef. 2. This view is echoed by Eusebius in his *Contra Hieroclem* 4.
38. Iamblichus *Vita Pythagorica* 29.166. Iamblichus devotes at least half of his biography to discussions of how Pythagorean virtues lived on in his disciples. See A. Priessnig, "Die literarische Form der Spätantiken Philosophenromane," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 30 (1929): 26–27, for a detailed classification of topics. Eusebius also devotes large sections of *HE* 6 to episodes in the lives of some of Origen's pupils. See especially *HE* 6.4–5.

disciples resembles a universe in miniature, with the philosopher at the center radiating the light of wisdom in the form of faithful followers. This suggests that the philosopher wielded real power. His wisdom did not die with him but lived on in adherents to the ideal that he so successfully embodied. Unfathomable knowledge was not the sole component of the holy philosopher model, however; nor could this wisdom by itself qualify a man for that divine status. In fact there is a trait as basic to the holy philosopher's character as his wisdom and one that serves as the foundation of all he is able to accomplish. The trait that complements the philosopher's wisdom is his devotion to an ascetic lifestyle.

From a perusal of biographies about holy philosophers, it is apparent that the men described have static personalities at best; holy philosophers never change. Apart from the biographers' interest in types of men rather than in individuals as such,[39] what accounts for the philosopher's constant espousal of the whole company of virtues? How is he sustained in his perfection?

Philostratus gives us a clue when, reflecting on the fact that Apollonius was true to his mission in such far-flung places as Ethiopia and Achaia, he says, "hard as it is to know oneself, I myself consider it still harder for the sage to remain always himself; for he cannot ever reform evil natures and improve them, unless he has first trained himself never to alter in his own person. . . . a man who is really a man will never alter his nature."[40] The wellspring of the sage's perfect self-knowledge, which enables him never to change, is his asceticism, which in Late Antiquity connotes not mere "training" but a renunciation of worldly values and bodily deprivation, if not actual abuse.

By the late first century A.D., the profession of philosophy and an ascetic mode of living were firmly linked in the popular mind and in the thinking of the intelligentsia as well.[41] Epictetus, for example, found it necessary to chide both those who indulged in extreme forms of self-discipline and those who encouraged the practice by admiring it.[42] Philosophers themselves advised philosophical seekers to follow an ascetic discipline: Sextus asserted

39. See Bieler, *ΘΕΙΟΣ ΑΝΗΡ*, 2 vols. (Vienna: Buchhandlung Oskar Höfels, 1935–36) 1:21–22, who notes that popular tradition is preserved in the remembering of historical personalities, which are subjected to a kind of "homogenizing" process when they are made to conform to a type.
40. Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* 6.35.
41. For general discussions of asceticism see Bieler, *ΘΕΙΟΣ ΑΝΗΡ*, 1:60–73, and Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, pp. 1–36.
42. Epictetus *Diss.* 3.12.

that true piety was founded on self-control; Maximus of Tyre's advice was to shun worldly preoccupation if one wanted to find the good; and in the *Hermetica*, knowledge of the good can come only with the inhibition of all the senses.[43] Philostratus, supporting the kind of thinking that Epictetus had earlier deplored, stated admiringly that Peregrinus Proteus was "one of those who have the courage of their philosophy, so much so that he threw himself into a bonfire at Olympia."[44] In his biography of Peregrinus Proteus, Lucian provides ample evidence of the popular admiration, even veneration, that this kind of "ascetic" display provoked. It is probable that a major purpose of his biography was to expose the pretentious and vainglorious origins of the cult and oracle established in Peregrinus' name after his death and to ridicule the "fools and dullards" so "wonderstruck" that they were willing to deify a charlatan on the illegitimate basis of a spectacular ascetic feat.[45]

Lucian's withering jibes at the showy asceticism of the simpleminded or unscrupulous philosopher provide the best testimony to the boom in a type of ascetic philosopher that his era experienced.[46] Ramsay MacMullen's description of the type is a good distillation of Lucian's view: "identified by their long hair, beards, bare feet, grimy rags, staffs and knapsacks; by their supercilious bearing, paraded morals, scowling abuse against all men and

43. *Sextus* 86a; *Corpus Hermeticum* 10.5.

44. Philostratus *Vitae Sophistarum* 563. In "The Volatilization of Peregrinus Proteus," *American Journal of Philology* 67 (1946): 334–45, Roger Pack suggests that Peregrinus' "volatilization" was not simply for notoriety, as Lucian thinks (*De morte Peregrini* 42), but may have been based on certain Neoplatonic doctrines on the soul. The notion of being "commingled with ether" (*De morte Peregrini* 33) may be based on the Heraclitean fragment that Porphyry preserves to the effect that "the dry soul is wisest" (Heraclitus fr. 118 Diels-Kranz, in Porphyry *De antro nympharum* 11). The idea of riding "upon the wings of fire" (*De morte Peregrini* 6) suggests "the Neoplatonic doctrine of *ochēma*, a kind of fiery envelope which enclosed the soul, protected it, and served as a vehicle for ascent." For further discussion of these doctrines, see E. R. Dodds, ed. and trans., *Proclus: The Elements of Theology*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 304 and Appendix II. Even if Peregrinus' self-immolation did have philosophical justification, it is certainly the most extreme form of ascetic witness to one's philosophical integrity.

45. Lucian *De morte Peregrini* 39–40. For a discussion of Lucian's motives, see Marcel Caster, *Lucien et la pensée religieuse de son temps* (Paris: Société d'Édition "*Les Belles Lettres*," 1937), pp. 237–46.

46. See Lucian *The Cynic*, esp. 1, 14, 17, 19; *Alexander*; *De morte Peregrini*; compare Lucian's *Philosophies for Sale* with the witness of several men to their own agonized searches for the "true" philosophy: Justin *Dialogue with Trypho*; Plotinus as reported by Porphyry *Vita Plotini* 3; Clement in *Clementine Homilies*; and the Cynic hero in Lucian's *Menippus*.

classes; they seemed shameless, and half-educated, vulgar, jesting; beggars for money, beggars for attention, parasites on patrons or petitioners at the door, clustered at temples or on street corners in cities; loudmouthed shouters of moral saws driven to a life of sham by poverty."[47] Much in the biographers' portraits of the holy philosopher's asceticism accords with Lucian's picture, although of course theirs are refined portrayals, divested of the sarcasm and satirical pungence of Lucian's

The divine philosopher's asceticism has two aspects. The first is an exterior one, which enables him to be identified publicly. Eusebius says that Origen persevered "in the most philosophic manner of life," and this is what his discipline consisted in: fasting; limiting sleep, which he took not on a couch but on the floor; going barefoot; living "in cold and nakedness" (i.e., extreme poverty); refusing the "numbers" of admirers who sought to share their goods with him; and eating a scanty diet, which actually injured his health. These feats were accompanied by Origen's avoidance of "everything that might lead to youthful lusts"; he spent his entire day teaching (" labors of no light character"), and for most of the night he engaged in his studies of scripture.[48] The picture Porphyry gives of Plotinus is much the same: he disapproved of eating animal flesh and took very little food, "often not even a piece of bread," and neglected sleep in order not to interrupt his contemplations.[49] Plotinus was actually ashamed of his body, considering it something "not worth looking at," and refused medical treatment for his illnesses.[50] That Plotinus practised what he preached is confirmed by his treatise "On Well-Being." Here he states that the good man is not a mixture of body and soul, nor is well-being measured by bodily health or beauty. "It is absurd to maintain that well-being extends as far as the living body, since well-being is the good life, which is concerned with the soul and is an activity of the soul." In order to make clear the fact that the real man reposes in the soul, Plotinus actually advises "a sort of counterpoise on the other side." One should make the body worse, to highlight the soul.[51] With

47. Ramsay MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 59.

48. Eusebius *HE* 6.3.9–12. 49. Porphyry *Vita Plotini* 2, 8. 50. Ibid., 1–2.

51. Plotinus *Enn.* 1.4.14. Note that at the end of this treatise, Plotinus softens his language by adopting the metaphor of a musician playing a lyre: the wise man "will care for and bear with that which is joined to him [the body] as long as he can, like a musician with his lyre, as long as he can use it; if he cannot use it he will change to another, or give up using the lyre and abandon the activities directed to it. Then he will have something else to do which does not need the lyre, and will let it lie unregarded beside him while he sings without an

respect to actual physical deprivation and injury, Origen and Plotinus are exemplars of an extreme ascetic ideal not characteristic of Pythagoras and Apollonius, though these latter are similar in respect to the other physical manifestations of the holy sage's ascetic style of life.[52]

One scholar has characterized the ascetic attempt to master the body a "flagrant antithesis to the norms of civilized life in the Mediterranean."[53] What is the point of it all? The most obvious reason is for identification. As Lucian's Cynic notes, his style of dress enables him to keep the kind of company he chooses, and to live the quiet philosophical life. Ignorant men and "fops," not understanding what his dress and appearance mean, will shun him, which is all the better.[54] The sage's style of life identifies him to those who know and desire what the philosophic life is, and it excites admiration for him.

Both Eusebius and Philostratus make a direct connection between the sage's ascetic lifestyle and the admiration for him which his followers express.[55] Asceticism places the philosopher in the public eye and advertises the value of his profession. But the sage's physical withdrawal from the ways of the world is not just for the purpose of public relations; it is also a sign of his freedom. The more he retreats from the society around him, the freer he is from the passions that bog down and befuddle lesser minds. His spirit is liberated, and this gives him the rare ability to exercise his wisdom in communication with the gods.[56] This idea points to the other, interior or spiritual, aspect of the divine sage's asceticism, because the sage's physical withdrawal is simply the outer manifestation of certain philosophical convictions.

The abstention from eating meat is a widely attested ascetic practice,

instrument. Yet the instrument was not given him at the beginning without good reason. He has used it often up till now" (*Enn.* 1.4.16).

52. See Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* 1.8: "he declined to live upon a flesh diet, on the ground that it was unclean, and also that it made the mind gross; so he partook only of dried fruits and vegetables. . . . he took to walking without shoes by way of adornment and clad himself in linen raiment . . . and he let his hair grow long and lived in the Temple." See also Porphyry *Vita Pythagorae* 7, 34–35.

53. Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), pp. 97–98. Note that Brown applies this statement to the Christian holy men; it is true of the pagan sages as well.

54. Lucian *The Cynic* 19.

55. Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* 1.8; Eusebius *HE* 6.3.13.

56. See the discussion by A. J. Festugière, "Sur une nouvelle édition du 'De Vita Pythagorica' de Jamblique," *Rev. Ét. Grec.* 50 (1937):492–94.

characteristic of all the holy philosophers under discussion. The philosophical basis for this abstention is expressed explicitly by Porphyry, who thought that meat-eating bound the soul more closely to the body. The soul, originally a spiritual being, now exists, through some fault, in a corporeal prison. By denying it corporeal sustenance, it is brought closer to its former spiritual self.[57] Abstention from meat, then, is a rite of purity; as Apollonius notes, one should avoid meat because it is "unclean" and dulls the mind.[58]

A clear picture of ascetic dietary practices in general is given in the biographies of Pythagoras. Porphyry describes Pythagoras' vegetarian diet in detail and remarks that, as a consequence, his health was consistently good. He did not fluctuate between good health and disease, and his soul "always revealed through his appearance the same disposition."[59] The point is that Pythagoras, because of his ascetic discipline, was not subject to passions of the body and thus was not prevented from "familiarity with the gods."[60]

The Pythagorean view of dietary asceticism, which nourishes the body for the good of a correspondingly harmonious soul, is in contradiction to the kind of ascetic self-torture Origen and Plotinus were said to engage in, which led to actual physical injury. Eusebius' portrait may be simply a stylized effort to show Origen going one step further than even the most famous ascetics, but Porphyry's picture is so detailed that it seems to be an actual (historical) description. Plotinus himself states that when the sage finds himself in pain, "he will oppose to it the power which he has been given for the purpose."[61] Perhaps he exemplifies that hostility to the material world which manifests itself in abuse of the body; in this respect he is akin more to the desert fathers than to his philosophical contemporaries.[62]

The whole course of ascetic practices is based on the idea that only by

57. Porphyry *De abstinentia* 1.30, discussed by Anthony Meredith, "Asceticism—Christian and Greek," *JTS*, N.S., vol. 27, pt. 2 (October, 1976), p. 319 and n. 1. Iamblichus agreed that "certain foods are hostile to the reasoning power, and impede its true energy," *Vita Pythagorica* 6.68. See also Porphyry *Vita Pythagorae* 46.

58. Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* 1.8. See also Bieler, *ΘΕΙΟΣ ΑΝΗΡ*, 1:63–64.

59. Porphyry *Vita Pythagorae* 34–35. 60. Iamblichus *Vita Pythagorica* 24.106.

61. Plotinus *Enn.* 1.4.14.

62. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, pp. 27–30. Dodds gives the following rather gloomy examples of his thesis that hostility against the material world was introjected, taking the form of bodily abuse: *Gospel of Thomas* 110: "Woe to the flesh that hangs upon the soul! Woe to the soul that hangs upon the flesh!"; *Corpus hermeticum* 7.2: the body is "the dark gaol, the living death, the corpse revealed, the tomb we carry about with us."

withdrawal from the world of the senses can the soul commune with the spiritual realm, which Numenius described as "a kind of divine desolation."[63] Asceticism was, in effect, a salvation from the body. The holy philosopher's great wisdom will bring him no benefit unless he is first purified. The genuine philosopher is united to God by his abstinence; it is on the basis of this union that his other virtues are nourished.[64]

We have seen that the holy philosopher was typically wise and typically ascetic. His wisdom was revealed not only in his communion with the gods, but also in his communion with men. He was the teacher par excellence whose instruction shaped the lives it touched, and he was the good shepherd, taking responsibility for the well-being of his disciples. His asceticism was based on the conviction that a body purified of material dross freed the soul to engage in divine contemplations. This inner purity had superficial connotations as well since holy sages adopted habits of dress, eating, and uncommonly heavy work schedules, all of which identified their station in society. These traits came together in biographies to form a pattern, a blueprint for the type of the divine philosopher. It is an ideal type, a picture of perfection, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to discern either the extent to which the biographers have molded their heroes to fit the type or the extent to which the heroes themselves actually imitated the ideal. Nevertheless, the image of the divine philosopher presented in biographies is a coherent one, at least with respect to the traits just discussed. However, there were other traits that were not held in common. Study of these traits shows that there were actually two major types, or paradigms, subsisting under the general appelation of holy sage.

Biographical Paradigms of the Divine Philosopher

In *The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker*, David Tiede asserts that the traditions about divine wise men fall into two categories: those describing the rational, philosophical figure and those describing the miracle worker. He maintains that the origins of these two traditions are "discrete," that early in the Hellenistic period there were two "competing conceptions of

63. Numenius as quoted by Eusebius *Praeparatio Evangelica* 11.22.
64. Porphyry *De Abstinentia* 2.49. See Meredith, "Asceticism—Christian and Greek," pp. 320–21.

divine presence": one highlighting the charismatic, miracle-working figure, the "pre-Socratic shaman type"; the other emphasizing the moral and intellectual virtues of the philosophical type, which "resists the admixture of teratological accounts."[65] He states further:

> This discrimination between differing notions of divine presence and their corresponding semi-literary forms is basic to this study. In order to create the complete aggregate portrait of the "divine man," it was necessary for Hellenistic authors like Philostratus and Porphyry to superimpose these contrasting images and to mix the forms in a way similar to the editorial work of the authors of the gospels of Mark and John. Largely because of the continuing vitality of the Platonic image of Socrates, authors like Plutarch, Lucian, and Celsus are able to resist such syncretism.[66]

This view of the origin and development of literary images of the holy man is difficult to accept for several reasons. The first concerns Tiede's use of sources to document the two contrasting images of the holy man. At times he appears to refer to holy men in a wide variety of sources; at other times he plainly means to discuss biographies of holy men, which are clearly formulated literary works marked by an intentionality, a conscious creative purpose not found in random reporting of tidbits about assorted "holy" characters. He notes the existence of "semi-literary" forms but does not say what they may have been, nor how they might have influenced the formation of images of the holy man. In either case, however, whether one considers the "traditions" or the biographies in which the images were given coherent literary expression, his notion that two images of the holy man—one a philosopher, the other a magician or miracle worker—developed separately and merged only as a result of "syncretism" at a much later time (the second century A.D.) is incorrect. In fact, Tiede's own analysis of the first two holy men he chooses to discuss, Pythagoras and Empedocles, contradicts his opening assertions.

In the case of Empedocles, Tiede admits that it seems likely that he actually did "unite the roles of shaman and scientist in his own person,"[67] and quotes with approval E. R. Dodds' statement in *The Greeks and the Irrational* (p. 146) that "Empedocles represents not a new but a very old type

65. David Tiede, *The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker*, SBL Dissertation Series 1 (Missoula, Montana: Society of Biblical Literature, 1972), pp. 5, 29, 22, 60.
66. Ibid., pp. 41–42.
67. Ibid., p. 20.

of personality, the shaman who combines the still undifferentiated functions of magician and naturalist, poet and philosopher, preacher, healer, and public counsellor."[68] According to Tiede, however, the likelihood that Empedocles was both philosopher and magician does not contradict his thesis because Empedocles' combination of these roles was "personal." He goes on to state that the source for Diogenes Laertius' portrait of Empedocles was apparently Heraclides' collection of legends, which gave a shamanistic interpretation of Empedocles, and adds that there are "less paradoxographical" options for understanding Empedocles. Aristotle, Satyrus, and Lucretius all praise his more "rational" gifts and treat him as a philosopher.[69] But what does this prove? It is not really too surprising to find a person like Heraclides, known to be a "collector of absurdities," emphasizing the miraculous or fantastic aspects of an unusual individual like Empedocles, nor is it surprising to find philosophers praising philosophical virtues. The fact that the personal biases of Empedocles' interpreters are reflected in the way they chose to remember him says nothing about the original differentiation between the philosopher and the miracle worker. The most one can say on the basis of such evidence is that divinity lies in the eye of the beholder. And, despite what later interpreters thought, Empedocles' assertions about himself in his poems suggest that in fact he and other early holy men were omnicompetent, and that philosophy and magic were not competing but complementary characteristics.[70]

The case for Pythagoras is much the same. He was pictured as both a philosopher and a miracle worker as early as the fourth century B.C.,[71] a fact that disproves the notion that a synthetic or syncretistic portrait of Pythagoras did not appear until the work of Apollonius. Tiede is correct in pointing to disagreements about Pythagoras' integrity.[72] Hermippus characterized his wonderworking as a charlatan's tricks, whereas Callimachus defended both his miraculous abilities as well as his superior intellect.[73] It is not correct, however, to suggest that the more rational picture of Pythagoras the philosopher was eroded or corrupted by the image of the miracle worker.[74] The earliest testimonies we have show that Pythagoras' reputation was established first on the basis of his miracles; in his case, the image of the miracle worker was later combined with the philosophical image.[75]

68. Ibid.
69. Ibid., p. 21.
70. See E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), pp. 145–46. For the fragments of Empedocles, see H. Diels, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Berlin, 1934), I:276–375.
71. Isidore Lévy, *Recherches sur les sources de la légende de Pythagore* (Paris: Éditions Ernest Leroux, 1926), pp. 22–36.
72. Tiede, *The Charismatic Figure*, pp. 14–23.
73. Lévy, *Recherches sur les sources de la légende de Pythagore*, pp. 36–42.

A further point against the untenable suggestion that conceptions of wise man and miracle man were in constant competition concerns evaluations of Socrates after his death. Tiede asserts that the "moral and rational image" of Socrates that Plato created provided the criterion by which other interpretations of Socrates were judged "incorrect."[76] Yet Plato himself attributed part of Socrates' status as a wise man to "irrational" sources: Socrates pursued his quest for truth at the behest of the god and through oracles and dreams; his daimon was "divine and spiritual" and "the signal of God."[77] Subsequent portraits of Socrates emphasize this aspect even more heavily so that the voice becomes an actual divine being.[78] What, then, of the rational image that shows the miraculous aspect to be incorrect? Tiede's documentation of the continuing influence of the rational Socratic image on succeeding holy man portraits is insufficient, and it does not help to explain why, for example, the mantic and wise figure of Pythagoras, not Socrates, came to hold the position of honor among Neoplatonists; nor is his thesis aided by the critique of Plato himself found in the Pythagoras biographies.[79]

Clearly, Tiede's argument that the divine philosopher of Graeco-Roman biographies is simply an aggregate of two distinct ancestors, one revered for his intellect, the other for his magical talents, does not provide an adequate basis for precise evaluation of the image of the divine philosopher. We have seen that in all biographies of divine philosophers, the heroes hold some characteristics in common. However, there are also important differences.

74. Tiede, *The Charismatic Figure*, p. 22.
75. Lévy, *Recherches sur les sources de la légende de Pythagore*, pp. 1–22.
76. Tiede, *The Charismatic Figure*, p. 60.
77. Plato *Apology* 33C, 31C, 40A–B.
78. See Plutarch *De genio Socratis* 580–82, and Apuleius *De deo Socratis* 157–67. For a discussion of Apuleius' treatment of Socrates' daemon see Jean Beaujeu, ed. and trans., *Apulée: opuscules philosophiques* (Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1973), pp. 239–44.
79. See Porphyry *Vita Pythagorae* 54: Plato and his followers "took as their own the fruitful elements" of Pythagoras' philosophy; Iamblichus *Vita Pythagorica* 27.131: Plato plagiarized Pythagoras' political theory, and 30.167: Plato learned the principle of justice from Pythagoreans.

As we will see, the biographers of Late Antiquity presented two distinct paradigms of the divine philosopher, and a dichotomy between "miracle" and "intellect" does not distinguish them sufficiently.

The two paradigms are best differentiated by the degree of divinity attributed to the specific philosopher. One paradigm, followed by Philostratus (*Life of Apollonius*), Porphyry (*Life of Pythagoras*), and Iamblichus (*Pythagorean Life*), characterizes the divine philosopher as a son of god. The other, followed by Porphyry (*Life of Plotinus*) and Eusebius ("Life of Origen"), attributes only a godlike status to the divine philosopher.[80] The essential decision as to whether the philosopher is a son of god or simply godlike determines the specifics of the biographical characterization.[81] Tiede would make miracle working or trafficking in magic the basic differentiation among holy men, but we shall see that the attribution of miracle- or magic working is a characteristic secondary to the more basic category "son of god."

In biographies, philosophers who are sons of god are distinguished from their godlike fellows by their birth stories, which provide them with divine parentage. Just before the child was born, Apollonius' mother was visited by the god Proteus in the form of an Egyptian daemon who claimed that she would bear Proteus, although another story, also reported by Philostratus, states that Apollonius' countrymen believed him to be a son of Zeus. Apollonius' birth was attended by swans or, according to the story that Philostratus prefers, by a thunderbolt, whose descent and ascent signified "the great distinction to which the sage was to attain . . . and how he should transcend all things upon earth and approach the gods."[82] The wonders accompanying his birth lend credence, in the opinion of Philostratus, to traditions acclaiming Apollonius as a true son of god.

Porphyry begins his biography of Pythagoras with accounts of various

80. In "The Concept of Immortals in Mediterranean Antiquity," Talbert makes a similar distinction between "immortals" and *theioi andres*, based primarily on the divine birth and final assumption of the former. In biographies, the distinctions between the two models are more complex.

81. That there were "degrees" of divinity a human being might attain, or a "scale" of divinity along which a given man might be located, was a popular idea, especially in early Neoplatonic circles. In *De defectu oraculorum* 415B–C, Plutarch even imagines that one could slide up and down on the scale, "a continual promotion and demotion," as John Dillon has remarked in *The Middle Platonists* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 219. Biographers, however, were not concerned to slide their heroes up and down but rather to establish precise ranking on the scale.

82. Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* 1.5–6.

historians concerning the historical identity of Pythagoras' father Mnesarchus, but ends his discussion of Pythagoras' patrimony by remarking that Apollonius' biography shows Pythagoras to be the son of Apollo and only nominally the son of Mnesarchus.[83] Porphyry himself has found, and quotes, confirmation of this in "one of the Samian poets," and adds further support to the connection with Apollo by relating the story linking Pythagoras with Abaris, priest of the Hyperborean Apollo. Abaris guesses Pythagoras to be the Hyperborean Apollo incarnate, and Pythagoras confirms his guess by showing him his golden thigh.[84] Porphyry's account of Pythagoras' divine lineage is magnified by Iamblichus. In his *Pythagorean Life*, a brief genealogy is developed, in which Pythagoras' line is traced back to Ancaeus of Samos, said to be a son of Zeus, though Iamblichus is not sure whether this descent was credited to him because of his virtue or "a certain greatness of soul."[85] Iamblichus explains that reports about Pythagoras' noble birth were due to his descent from Ancaeus, and he implies that these reports were eventually mythologized, so that Pythagoras came to be considered a son of Apollo.[86] This is how he accounts for the quotation from the Samian poet to which Porphyry had also referred.

Although Iamblichus seems unwilling to give historical credence to the idea of a god uniting with a human woman, he does not want to relinquish Pythagoras' divine status. He concludes that "no one disputes the fact that the soul of Pythagoras was sent down to men on the authority of Apollo, Pythagoras being either a companion of the god or related to this god in a more intimate (familial) way."[87] Iamblichus' opinion about Pythagoras' status becomes clearer in his version of the Abaris story. As in Porphyry's

83. Porphyry *Vita Pythagorae* 1–2. Further support for the nominal fatherhood of Mnesarchus *may* be found in the divine child legend in *Vita Pythagorae* 10. This story, which Porphyry has taken from Antonius Diogenes, *The Wonderful Things Beyond Thule*, is about a wondrous child whom Mnesarchus finds during his travels and adopts as his son. As Porphyry relates the story, Mnesarchus names this child Astraeus and raises him along with his other sons, one of whom is Pythagoras, who later adopts Astraeus as *his* son. The story seems confused. Was it originally intended to explain how Mnesarchus came to be Pythagoras' father, and was the child at first identified as Pythagoras himself? The name Astraeus (starry) would seem to fit well with later conceptions of Pythagoras' astrological discoveries.

84. Porphyry *Vita Pythagorae* 28.

85. Iamblichus *Vita Pythagorica* 2.3.

86. Iamblichus *Vita Pythagorica* 2.4–5. The poetic passage states that Pythagoras was the offspring of Pythais and Apollo: "Pythais, the most beautiful of the Samians, brought forth Pythagoras for Apollo, friend of Zeus."

87. Ibid., 2.8–9.

version, the revelation of the golden thigh confirms Abaris' conjecture that Pythagoras was Apollo. But Iamblichus appends to this a passage that sounds very much like a "christological" interpretation of Pythagoras: Pythagoras tells Abaris that he has come into the world for the care and well-being of men, and that he took on a human form (*anthrōpomorphos*) so that men would not be so astonished and unsettled by his "surpassing excellence" (*to hūperechon*) that they avoided his teaching.[88] Thus in Iamblichus' biography Pythagoras is at the very least a soul sent from Apollo's realm, and at most a god descended from Apollo.

In all three of these biographies of a son of god, the authors throw some doubt on the idea of the actual physical generation of the philosopher from a god, perhaps to be fair to historical sources (which obviously preserved differing views of each hero's divinity), perhaps to retain the hero's humanity and to avoid the notion of a corporeal god so repugnant to pagans. However, the fact remains that the miraculous birth stories are reported and later confirmed by other evidence of divine origins. It is instructive to note that Porphyry's presentation of a divine Pythagoras, although qualified by a profusion of conflicting reports of parentage, was clearly perceived and magnified by Iamblichus. And the point of Philostratus' portrayal of Apollonius was discerned much later by the biographer Eunapius, who remarked that Philostratus should have titled his work not *The Life of Apollonius* but *The Visit of God to Mankind*.[89]

The biographies using the godlike paradigm for the divine philosopher do not present miraculous birth stories; nor is there even a hint of his generation from a god. Origen's life story begins with his childhood. Except for one anecdote from his youth, we do not meet Plotinus until he is a young man engaged in an agonized search for the true philosophy. Why this difference? Plotinus and Origen's lack of divine origins can be explained by certain philosophical convictions of the philosophers themselves. A statement in Porphyry's biography of Plotinus gives us an intriguing clue: no one knew when Plotinus was born because he refused to celebrate his birthday. This refusal stemmed from his rather gnostic shame of being in a body, which also led him to avoid discussing his parents and place of birth.[90] Similar feelings were expressed by Origen. In his *Commentary on Matthew*, he states: "A certain author has observed before us what has been recorded in

88. Ibid., 19.92.
89. Eunapius *Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists* 454.
90. Porphyry *Vita Plotini* 1–2.

Genesis about the birthday of Pharaoh, and has explained that the common man, being fond of the circumstances of his birth, celebrates his birthday. But in no writing do we find a birthday being celebrated by a righteous man."[91] Elsewhere he treats birth in an even more derogatory manner, asserting that the saints not only do not celebrate their birthdays; they curse the day they were born.[92] This is a telling example of the alienated feeling that was one of the justifications for the ascetic lifestyle discussed earlier. Clearly if the body is a jail for the soul, one would not want to celebrate the anniversary of the imprisonment. If Eusebius was a faithful follower of his mentor's strictures, he could not give a glamorous account of Origen's birth in his biography, for by Origen's own admission that would place him in the company of sinners, and that is the last thing Eusebius wants to do. The same can be said of Porphyry. The philosophical bias against birthdays, symbols of human corporeality, could have prevented the fabrication of marvelous birth stories for these two philosophers.

This is, however, only a partial explanation and not wholly convincing when the dynamics of biography writing are considered. The biographical process of creating an ideal character out of the historical data of a man's life suggests that it is the philosophical and historical stance of the biographer, rather than of the subject himself, that dominates the composition of the biography. As Aristoxenus' scurrilous biography of Socrates illustrates, there was no biographical "ethic" that might have prevented the creation of stories about Origen and Plotinus for the purpose of highlighting or bringing into focus certain facets of their characters. In other words, there was nothing to prevent either Porphyry or Eusebius from initiating a myth; after all, the mythologizing process has to start somewhere. Although the origin of a myth is difficult to trace, we have seen a good example of how a myth grows in Iamblichus' elaboration of Porphyry's version of Pythagoras' divine birth. It is possible, of course, that since Porphyry and Eusebius considered themselves heirs in a philosophical sense to Plotinus' and Origen's work, their biographies reflect a continuity from mentor to student that made their characterizations more straightforward, less mythological. However, the fact that Porphyry wrote two biographies of divine philosophers that use very different standards for assessing and portraying character was not an historical accident or a slip of the biographical pen. It is most probable that in their biographies of Plotinus and Origen, Porphyry and

91. Origen *Commentary on Matthew* 10.22.
92. Origen *Homilies on Leviticus* 8.3.

Eusebius are portraying a type of the divine philosopher that differs from the numinous, savior-like posture of Pythagoras or Apollonius.

Another difference between these two paradigms concerns the extent to which the divine philosopher can be known and identified. As Jonathan Smith has pointed out, what is most characteristic of the philosopher who is considered to be a son of god is that he is *sui generis*, in a class by himself. Because he occupies this special, sacred territory, which is inaccessible to others, he is misunderstood and wrongly classified by both enemies and disciples alike.[93] Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius* provides good examples of both the elusive identity and the misconceptions of the sage who is a son of god. Philostratus begins his biography with a brief paean of praise to Pythagoras, emphasizing his contact with, and good favor among, the Olympian gods. The reader learns from later passages that Apollonius considered himself to be a votary of Pythagoras, had vowed to live the Pythagorean life, and called Pythagoras his "spiritual ancestor."[94] In spite of this apparent identification of Apollonius with Pythagoras, however, Philostratus does not intend this little introduction to be an indirect eulogy to Apollonius through praise of the figure he emulated. It is intended rather to define in a positive way what Apollonius was not, for we read in the following chapter that Apollonius was in fact more divine than his "spiritual ancestor."[95] Apollonius, then, was greater than Pythagoras. What does this tell us about him? Philostratus does not say but continues instead with comments on what Apollonius was not: he was not a magician, nor a "sage of an illegitimate kind," nor a false prophet. Similar misconceptions obscured the identity of Pythagoras. Iamblichus notes that "some celebrated him as the Pythian, but others as the Hyperborean Apollo, some again considered him as Paeon, others as one of the daemons that inhabit the moon, and others as one of the Olympian gods who sometimes appear in human form."[96]

As elusive as the conflicting views of outsiders (who remain largely anonymous) are the self-revelations of the sons of god themselves and the responses of their disciples. In Apollonius' case, as Smith has observed, the sage's favorite form of self-identification is an "I am" (*egō eimi*) pronouncement: he is, simply, Apollonius.[97] Tantalizing clues of what this might mean are scattered throughout the biography. His pupil and traveling companion Damis at first regards Apollonius as a daemon, but later finally understands Apollonius to be divine and superhuman—although even after this supposed realization he continues to be amazed by Apollonius' freedom from human convention.[98] Apollonius himself speaks in riddles and parables,[99] although he was able to communicate effectively even while keeping the ritual five-year Pythagorean silence,[100] and is fond of making enigmatic statements about himself.[101] He is fundamentally a free spirit, able to command respect among the most diverse groups and to break through the usual human boundaries of language and custom. Most of all, Apollonius possesses power, as even the most formidable of Roman officials are forced to admit.[102] In spite of Philostratus' long, rambling narrative, Apollonius' true nature is never really classified adequately. He is the changeling, as his early identification with Proteus suggested. His life is simply a series of episodes, from which the reader receives momentary glimpses of Apollonius' effect on other men. The only lasting impression is one of superhuman power, and perhaps this, more than any of his marvelous acts, is what defines Apollonius' character.

Pythagoras' special position in the cosmic scheme of things is stated more explicitly. Iamblichus relates one of the Pythagoreans' greatest secrets, preserved by Aristotle in his work on Pythagorean philosophy: three kinds of rational, living beings exist—gods, men, and beings like Pythagoras.[103] Pythagoras is thus in a class by himself, and tags like "child (son) of god" (*ho*

93. Jonathan Z. Smith, "Good News Is No News: Aretalogy and Gospel," *Christianity, Judaism, and Other Greco-Roman Cults*, ed. Jacob Neusner, 4 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), vol. 1: *New Testament*, pp. 24–27.
94. Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* 1.7; 4.16.
95. Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* 1.2: "more divinely than Pythagoras he wooed wisdom and soared above tyrants."
96. Iamblichus *Vita Pythagorica* 6.30.

97. Jonathan Z. Smith, "Good News Is No News: Aretalogy and Gospel," p. 28. See Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* 1.21; 6.9.
98. Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* 1.19; 7.38; 7.41.
99. Ibid., 1.20, 4.9, 6.11.
100. Ibid., 1.15.
101. Ibid., 1.21: In an interview, a Babylonian satrap asks Apollonius, "Whence do you come to us, and who sent you?" as if he was asking questions of a spirit. And Apollonius replied: 'I have sent myself, to see whether I can make men of you, whether you like it or not.' He asked a second time who he was to come trespassing like that into the king's country, and Apollonius said: 'All the earth is mine, and I have a right to go all over it and through it.'"
102. Ibid., 4.44, the statement by Tigellinus, "you are too powerful to be controlled by me."
103. Iamblichus *Vita Pythagorica* 6.31.

theou pais) and "divine daemon" (*daimōn theios*) are really inadequate means of pinpointing his character.[104] As in Apollonius' case, the reader is presented with a catalog of acts and sayings that illustrate but do not exhaust the figure's richness. One can document Pythagoras' oracular speech, his knowledge of the odyssey of his own soul, and his unique understanding of the "heavenly harmonies of the cosmos,"[105] but eventually one can only say, with Porphyry, that "ten thousand other things yet more marvelous and more divine are told about the man. . . . To put it bluntly, about no one else have greater and more extraordinary things been believed."[106] Once again, what remains is a potent impression of an "unspeakable, unfathomable divine nature" that hovers just beyond the reach of mortal comprehension.[107]

By contrast, the godlike philosopher is not shrouded in such deep mystery. Origen and Plotinus are not pictured as phenomena in spiritual, moral, and intellectual worlds of their own creation. They are rather squarely placed in philosophical traditions that validate and help to identify them. In a later chapter I will discuss whether the "schools" to which they belonged were really as cohesive as the biographers suggest, but it is sufficient here to point out that Eusebius and Porphyry have described a *diadochē*, a philosophical chain of succession from teacher to student, within which Origen and Plotinus are placed and thereby identified. It is true, of course, that Apollonius' and Pythagoras' teachers are also enumerated; but they constitute a diverse, largely anonymous group ("the Chaldeans," "the Magi," "the Egyptian priests") and they certainly do not form a scholastic tradition. In Apollonius and Pythagoras' case the educational background serves more as a *praeparatio*, a demonstration of the sage's intellectual flexibility, and proof of his comprehensive grasp of sacred knowledge. Origen and Plotinus, however, are not portrayed as philosophical eclectics. They are located in specific traditional positions, albeit special ones, for they are the figures who have given their respective schools focus and fame.

Plotinus, pupil of the middle Platonist Ammonius, is shown to be the heir, ultimately, of Socrates and Plato. Porphyry says that Plotinus celebrated the traditional anniversaries of their birthdates, and made plans to found a city of philosophers, called Platonopolis, governed by Plato's *Laws*.[108] More important, however, was his study of the commentaries of his

104. Ibid., 2.10, 3.16. 105. Ibid., 7.34, 14.63, 15.65.
106. Porphyry *Vita Pythagorae* 28–29. 107. Iamblichus *Vita Pythagorica* 15.65.
108. Porphyry *Vita Plotini* 2, 12. On birthday celebrations in the Academy for Socrates and Plato, see Plutarch *Quaest. conv.* 717B. It was a practice of philosophical schools in general to honor birthdays of founders and appearances of guardian daemons. See *PW* 13, cols. 1135–1149, s.v. *Genethlios hēmera*, by W. Schmidt.

Platonic predecessors, which formed a basic component of the sessions of Plotinus' school.[109] His fame as a vital and prominent link in the succession of Platonic philosophers is suggested by his enemies' charge that he simply plagiarized Numenius, one of the giants of second-century Platonic and Neopythagorean philosophy.[110] But it is best attested by his writings, which are given conspicuous attention in Porphyry's biography.[111]

Origen, too, is shown as a schoolman. Eusebius pictures him as successor to Clement of Alexandria and Pantaenus in the leadership of the Alexandrian catechetical school and, later, as founder of the Caesarean school in which Eusebius himself had studied.[112] Like Porphyry, Eusebius shows his hero as safeguard and brilliant interpreter of his inherited philosophical tradition, and he also devotes a large part of his biography to lists and brief discussions of the philosopher's writings.[113] For the question of the philosopher's identity, it is important to note that not only are Origen and Plotinus located in specific scholastic traditions but also that their lasting, personal contributions in the form of treatises and students are clearly emphasized. Both Eusebius and Porphyry are careful to identify the students and successors of each philosopher;[114] they leave no doubt about the striking personal impact of the philosopher's teaching and the scholastic continuity it ensured.

There is no such clarity concerning the effect of Apollonius and Pythagoras. Their impact is universal but vague,[115] and the content of their public teaching consists of bland, commonplace ethical and metaphysical doctrines.[116] However, the popular morality that they preach to the world is really a mask, for hidden from general view are their private mysteries into which only an inner circle of disciples is initiated.[117] There is no such

109. Porphyry *Vita Plotini* 14. 110. Ibid., 17–18, 21.
111. Ibid., 4–6, 24–26. 112. Eusebius *HE* 6.3.3, 6.6.1, 6.26.
113. Ibid., 6.19, 6.3.9–11; lists of works: 6.16, 6.24–25, 6.28, 6.32, 6.36, 6.38.
114. Ibid., 6.4–5, 6.30, 6.40–42, 44–46 (Dionysius); 6.3.1–2, 6.15 (Heraclas). Porphyry *Vita Plotini* 4–5, 7, 9, 16–17.
115. For example, all Greece "flocks" to hear Apollonius (Philostratus *Vita Apollinii* 8.15), and Pythagoras is able to convert and reform entire cities (Porphyry *Vita Pythagorae* 2–22).
116. Note the long sections in Iamblichus' *Vita Pythagorica* devoted to such topics as piety (28.134–56), justice (30.167–86), courage (32.214–28), and friendship (33.229–40).
117. Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* 1.16: "At sunrise he performed certain rites by himself, rites

dichotomy in the teaching of Plotinus and Origen, who are portrayed throughout their biographies as exponents of a particular philosophy to a particular group. Nor are their profound philosophical discoveries obscured by "arcane symbols" in the Pythagorean manner, since their thoughts were recorded in writing. In short, the *philosophical* characterizations of godlike sages do not deal in enigma and allusion; in this respect the character of godlike philosophers is subject to rational scrutiny.

In the same way that Origen and Plotinus are not elusive in the intellectual realm, they are also not part of an ontological category that excludes other men. They are not members of that mysterious middle category of beings neither god nor man. They are men, but they are special men. Porphyry begins his account of the revelation of Plotinus' special nature with the statement that "Plotinus certainly possessed by birth something more than other men."[118] The story concerns Plotinus' encounter with an Egyptian priest who wanted to evoke Plotinus' "companion spirit" (*oikeios daimōn*). "When the spirit [*ton daimona*] was summoned to appear a god [*theon*] came and not a being of the spirit order, and the Egyptian said, 'Blessed are you, who have a god for your spirit and not a companion of the subordinate order.'"[119] The idea of a companion spirit or indwelling daemon was not, of course, a startling one; it appears as early as Hesiod and was made "morally and philosophically respectable," as E. R. Dodds remarks, by Plato, for whom the daemon was the rational "spirit-guide" in men.[120] That Plotinus' daemon turned out to be "of the more godlike kind" (*tōn theioterōn daimonōn*), as Porphyry describes it, was unusual; his spirit was in the highest rank possible for a human being.[121]

Origen, too, was specially blessed. Time and time again, he is protected by "divine and heavenly providence" and deemed worthy of divine aid and grace that save his life—Eusebius says "it is impossible to say how often"—so that he might continue in his "excessive zeal and boldness for the word of Christ."[122] Even more revealing of his stature is the divine spirit (*theion pneuma*) that dwelt in his breast.[123] Clearly, like Plotinus, Origen was possessed of a spirit of high order, but what distinguishes them so sharply from Pythagoras and Apollonius is that they are never elevated beyond the confines of mortality. Certainly they are "first among men," but never more than that; they do not ascend to the same height of divinity as the philosophers who are characterized as sons of god.

which he only communicated to those who had disciplined themselves by a four years' spell of silence."

118. Porphyry *Vita Plotini* 10.

119. Ibid., 10.

120. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, pp. 42–43.

121. Ibid., Appendix III, pp. 289–91.

122. Eusebius *HE* 6.2.4, 6.3.5, 6.3.7, 6.2.13.

123. Ibid., 6.2.11.

A final distinction remains to be made between our two models of the divine philosopher. Sons of god work miracles; the godlike types do not. We have seen that miracle working is not the primary distinguishing factor between these two types; that factor is rather the mode of presentation. One type remains essentially incomprehensible throughout the biographical characterization and is not really contained within the historical era with which he is associated. The power of his presence transcends the particularities of history. The other type is more closely associated with the human community; he is a man, although a remarkable one, and is more easily understood because his activities can be placed within definite historical frameworks. Miracle working is one more instance of the son of god's supernatural abilities: just as he is able to dominate men, so also is he able to dominate nature. This dominion takes two forms: the manipulation of natural phenomena, and the healing of mental and physical disease. Pythagoras, for example, is able to communicate with bears, oxen, birds, and rivers, quell violent weather, and appear in far-distant places on the same day.[124] Apollonius heals plague-stricken people, raises a woman from the dead, exorcizes demons, and so on.[125] Miracle stories like these are able to convey in a dramatic, colorful way the overwhelming power of the particular figure. This may be why ancient and modern scholars alike have seized upon them as demonstrations of the numinous. They give power an almost tangible reality. Biographers using the model of the son of god did not, however, emphasize miracle stories to the extent that some modern scholarship might lead one to believe.[126] They are simply part of the total range of characteristics marshaled in the attempt to define the nature of the son of god.

In this chapter we have seen that by the second century A.D., the philosopher had come to be considered a holy figure with spiritual and intellectual powers that far surpassed those of ordinary men. He was a figure for whom

124. Porphyry *Vita Pythagorae* 23–25, 27, 29.

125. Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* 4.10, 4.45, 4.20.

126. See Smith's discussion in "Prolegomena to a Discussion of Aretalogies, Divine Men, the Gospels, and Jesus," pp. 188–98.

the term "divine" was appropriate. But "divine" was a much-abused term. Comparison of the biographies devoted to these divine philosophers shows that there were two major types of divinity ascribed to philosophers. To call Pythagoras or Apollonius divine was to suggest that he was a son of god, possessed of miraculous, prophetic, and intellectual powers far beyond human capacity. To call Origen or Plotinus divine was to suggest that he was an especially gifted man, blessed by God, whose status was achieved by the purity and steadfastness of his devotion to philosophical tradition and to the reasoning faculty. It is apparent that there were two very different conceptions of a philosopher's holiness, and when these conceptions were applied in biographies, two different kinds of characterizations emerged. In biographies of sons of god, we have not an idealized account of the life of an historical personality, but impressions of a powerful, personal presence remembered and amplified through time. In biographies of godlike philosophers, in contrast, we have idealized accounts of men whose historical identity was at least partially protected by the survival of their written works in the very scholastic circles of which their biographers were a part.

CHAPTER THREE

Literary Aspects of Biography

Biographies of holy philosophers were creative historical works, promoting models of philosophical divinity and imposing them on historical figures thought to be worthy of such idealization. The stereotypical traits that the biographies used to develop the models—in other words, the contents of the texts—were discussed in the preceding chapter, but an adequate understanding of these texts calls for an explication of their literary form also. Scholarship devoted to a literary analysis of biographies of Graeco-Roman holy men has focused primarily on attempts to define a genre that these biographies represent.[1] Unfortunately, the literary heritage bequeathed to Graeco-Roman authors by classical and Hellenistic authors has been largely neglected in this search for genre, since the search has concentrated on later biographies primarily to determine whether they are later representatives of a genre within which the gospels might be placed. For the most part, these discussions of genre have dealt with content, that is, with recurring details in biographies of divine men, and the question of form has been either neglected or assumed to be identical with content. Clearly form and content are closely connected, and neither can be discussed fruitfully in isolation. However, scholars have been so preoccupied with determining the provenance of materials about the divine man and with tracing the amazing proliferation of traditions that they have attempted to impose organizing patterns on the traditions concerning the *theios anēr* (holy man) without really considering the structural elements of the supposed literary form itself. If the question of literary form, and its function, is to be addressed

1. Older studies include Richard Reitzenstein, *Hellenistische Wundererzählungen* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1906); A. Priessnig, "Die biographische Form der Plotinvita des Porphyrios und das Antoniosleben des Athanasios," *Byz. Zeitschr.* 64 (1971): 1–5; and idem, "Die literarische Form der Spätantiken Philosophenromane," *Byz. Zeitschr.* 30 (1929): 23–30. For a list of more recent studies see ch. 1, n. 1.

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