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Intellect Ordered: An Allusion to Plato in *Dialogue with Trypho* and Its Significance for Justin's Christian Epistemology

Abstract

This article examines a previously unidentified allusion to Plato in the 'old man's' final question to the still pre-Christian and Platonist Justin in *Dialogue* 4.1—'Or will the human mind (ἀνθρώπου νοῦς) ever see God if it has not been ordered (κεκοσμημένος) by a holy spirit?' I amplify this allusion in order to show how Justin, in the character of the old man, evokes Platonic language and ideas, and yet, at the same time, superimposes on them a Christian framework. By Christianizing this Platonic idiom he thus subverts his own erstwhile Platonic epistemology. I next relate this passage to a longstanding debate in scholarship on the *Dialogue* regarding the Christian epistemology that is being developed by Justin and, more specifically, to his oft-disputed descriptions of Christians as privileged recipients of a divinely granted 'grace to understand'. I consider how the epistemological corollaries that ensue from the old man's question in 4.1 sit alongside appeals to rational argument elsewhere in the *Dialogue* and Justin's depictions of divine and human agency more generally.

In the midst of a discussion on Platonic philosophy and the capacity of the human mind to 'speculate correctly or speak truly of God' (*Dial.* 3.7), the 'old man' of Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* responds to the still pre-Christian and Platonist Justin with a series of rhetorical questions meant to challenge Justin's doctrinaire appeals to Platonic teaching. These questions come aimed particularly at the epistemological confidence in Justin's remarks, which is to say, at Justin's Platonic certitude that the human can indeed apprehend the divine through the unaided natural mind: 'But the Deity...is to be perceived by the mind alone, as Plato affirms, and I agree with him' (3.7).¹ To this declaration of allegiance to Plato, the old man counters in 4.1:

'Does our mind, then,' he inquired, 'possess such and so great a power? Or does it not perceive that which exists through the senses? Or will the human mind ever see God if it has not been ordered by a holy spirit [or the Holy Spirit]?'²

¹ Cf. Plato, *Phaedr.* 247c.

² Translations of the *Dialogue* follow but at some points for matters of clarity alter the excellent work of Thomas B. Falls, *St. Justin Martyr: Dialogue with Trypho* (revised with new introduction by Thomas P. Halton; ed. Michael Slusser; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003).

Ἔστιν οὖν, φησί, τῷ νῷ ἡμῶν τοιαύτη τις καὶ τοσαύτη δύναμις, ἢ μὴ τὸ ὄν δι' αἰσθήσεως ἔλαβεν; ἢ τὸν θεὸν ἀνθρώπου νοῦς ὄψεται ποτε μὴ ἁγίῳ πνεύματι κεκοσμημένος;³

The subject of this article is the final of these questions: ‘Or will the human mind (ἀνθρώπου νοῦς) ever see God if it has not been ordered by the Holy Spirit (μὴ ἁγίῳ πνεύματι κεκοσμημένος)?’⁴ Although the reader of the *Dialogue* detects the true but, as of yet, undefined identity of the ‘holy spirit’ mentioned by the old man, Justin, still the unconverted Platonist, passes over this reference, returning in the remainder of 4.1 to Platonic commonplaces related to ‘the eye of the mind’⁵ and the affinity between the human intellect and the divine.⁶ As Justin will soon learn, however, human philosophies, including Platonism, ultimately fail when it comes to comprehending divine truth, for it is only through the alternative order of knowledge provided by the Holy Spirit of Israel’s God that the ‘gates of light’⁷ are opened and the truth of that God is known (see esp. 7.1-3).

Like Justin, scholars have also passed over a significant subtlety in the old man’s final question in 4.1—in this case an allusion—and it is one that sheds its own interesting light on a longstanding debate in scholarship on Justin and his *Dialogue*. The allusion concerns the ‘ordering’ of the human mind by the Holy Spirit which, I propose, is yet another of the numerous echoes of Plato in this section of the *Dialogue*, and a theologically resonant one as

³ Recent critical editions of the *Dialogue* have been produced by Miroslav Marcovich, *Iustini Martyris: Dialogus cum Tryphone* (PTS 47; Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997) and Philippe Bobichon, *Justin Martyr: Dialogue avec Tryphon* (Paradosis 47/1-2; Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2003).

⁴ Niels Hyldahl conjectures that μὴ ἁγίῳ πνεύματι κεκοσμημένος is a later addition. He assumes that since Christian themes are yet to appear in the *Dialogue* they could not have been introduced by Justin so abruptly here (*Philosophie und Christentum: Eine Interpretation der Einleitung zum Dialog Justins* [ATDan 9; Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1966], p. 192). My reading of the text as it stands is presented below, but let it be said at this point that I agree with J. C. M. van Winden’s assessment of Hyldahl’s proposal: ‘This argument certainly follows a wrong direction. The interpreter dictates to the author what he should or should not have written’ (*An Early Christian Philosopher: Justin Martyr’s Dialogue with Trypho Chapters One to Nine; Introduction, Text and Commentary* [Leiden: Brill, 1971], p. 70).

⁵ Plato refers synonymously to ‘the eye of the soul’ (τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ὄμμα) (*Rep.* 533d; *Soph.* 254a).

⁶ Cf. *Phaed.* 78b-84b; *Rep.* 611e.

⁷ On this image, see A. Cacciari, ‘In margine a Giustino, dial. vii, 3, le porte della luce’, in *In Verbis verum amare* (ed. P. Serra Zanetti; Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1980), pp. 101-34.

well.⁸ The debate I have in mind involves the question of the Christian epistemology that is developed by Justin in the *Dialogue*. This debate has centered on the meaning of a particular use of χάρις—and specifically on expressions such as the ‘grace to understand’ (χάρις τοῦ νοῆσαι) or the ‘grace to know’ (χάρις τοῦ γινῶναι)—but this debate is equally related to questions about the operations of divine and human agency with respect to human freedom and rationality. After examining the allusion in 4.1 and then clarifying the ways in which Platonic tradition is strategically reconfigured by the old man in Christian theological terms, I return to this debate about human and divine agency and consider how the epistemological corollaries that ensue from the old man’s questions in 4.1 sit alongside appeals to rational argument elsewhere in the *Dialogue*.

PLATO ON THE INTELLECT (ΝΟΥΣ) THAT ORDERS (ΚΟΣΜΕΩ) ALL THINGS

One easily infers from the old man’s question in *Dial.* 4.1 that the human ‘intellect’ (νοῦς) needs to be acted upon and ‘ordered’ (κεκοσμημένος) by the Holy Spirit in order to see (or know) God.⁹ More subtle is the fact that the correlation of νοῦς and κοσμέω with reference to an ordering divine force marks an additional allusion to Platonic teaching or, to be more precise, to the pre-Socratic philosopher Anaxagoras, to whom Plato attributes this doctrine. According to this Platonic-Anaxagorean tradition, νοῦς (or Νοῦς) is a demiurgic character responsible for creating and arranging the cosmos. This teaching is recounted in greatest detail in *Phaedo* 97c, as Socrates reports his prior intellectual quest to discover and

⁸ As far as I am aware, this particular allusion has not been noticed. For extensive inventories of the references to Plato in this section of the *Dialogue*, see Bobichon, *Justin Martyr: Dialogue avec Tryphon: Vol. 2*, pp. 586-90; Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries* (ed. Marshall D. Johnson; trans. Michael Steinhauser; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), pp. 418-22.

⁹ For Plato’s use of νοῦς more generally, see Gerd Van Riel, *Plato’s Gods* (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 69-70. The verb κοσμέω in this instance could be translated any number of ways: ‘ordered’, ‘arranged’, ‘equipped’, ‘adorned’ etc. I prefer to translate the phrase as ‘ordered by the Holy Spirit’ because I think this best captures the sense in which the raw material of intellect is present but in a disordered state. The Holy Spirit’s reordering thus restores the human mind to its proper orientation. This corresponds with the Platonic arguments regarding affinity between the cosmic and human νοῦς, but Christianizes them. I also understand being ‘adorned by the Spirit’ as more or less synonymous with ‘being filled (πληρωθέντες) by the Spirit’, as in the case of the prophets in 7.1.

understand the ‘cause’ of all things (96a-100c). In 97c Socrates describes his initial encounter with Anaxagoras’ theory that ‘intellect’ (νοῦς) is the force that ‘orders’ or ‘arranges’ (διακοσμέω) the universe and so engenders all reality:

Then one day I heard a man reading from a book, as he said, by Anaxagoras, that it is the intellect that arranges and causes all things (νοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ διακοσμῶν τε καὶ πάντων αἴτιος). I was pleased with this theory of cause, and it seemed to me to be somehow right that the intellect (νοῦν) should be the cause of all things, and I thought, ‘If this is so, the intellect in arranging things arranges everything (τόν...νοῦν κοσμοῦντα πάντα κοσμεῖν) and establishes each thing as it is best for it to be’.¹⁰

Despite Socrates’ initial optimism,¹¹ he ultimately finds Anaxagoras’ fuller elaboration of the theory inadequate since it ‘made no use of intelligence (τῷ...νῷ), and did not assign any real causes for the ordering of things (εἰς τὸ διακοσμεῖν)’.¹² As Socrates again states: ‘For I never imagined that, when he said they were ordered by mind (ὑπὸ νοῦ αὐτὰ κεκοσμηθῆσθαι), he would introduce any other cause for these things than that it is best for them to be as they are’.¹³

This hypothesis that ‘intellect’ (or νοῦς) ‘orders’ all things is again attributed to Anaxagoras by Socrates on two occasions in *Cratylus*:

Well, and do you not believe the doctrine of Anaxagoras (οὐ πιστεύεις Ἀναξαγόρα), that it is mind (νοῦν) or soul which orders (διακοσμοῦσαν) and holds the nature of all things?¹⁴

Another man says he laughs at all these notions, and that justice is what Anaxagoras says it is, mind (ὁ δίκαιον ὃ λέγει Ἀναξαγόρας, νοῦν εἶναι τοῦτο); for mind, he says, is ruled only by itself, is mixed with nothing, orders all things (πάντα...κοσμεῖν), and passes through them.¹⁵

In dialogues usually dated to Plato’s later period (*Laws* 966e-967b; *Philebus* 30c-30d), he again mentions the theory that ‘intellect orders all things’. Although Anaxagoras is not

¹⁰ Trans. Fowler, LCL.

¹¹ Socrates playfully remarks that he was initially delighted to have discovered an instructor who pleased his own νοῦς (97d).

¹² *Phaed.* 98b (Fowler, LCL). Socrates is dissatisfied with what he finds is Anaxagoras’ overly materialistic account of causation.

¹³ *Phaed.* 98a (Fowler, LCL).

¹⁴ *Crat.* 400a (Fowler, LCL).

¹⁵ *Crat.* 413b (Fowler, LCL).

explicitly named in these instances, in both the doctrine is described as traditional ('the utterances of those who declared of old that intellect always rules the universe' [*Phileb.* 30d]), and so he again must have Anaxagoras in mind.

Examination of the fragments and *testimonia* tradition ascribed to Anaxagoras (anthologized in Diels-Kranz's *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*) corroborates his original ownership of the doctrine that 'intellect orders all things'. The relevant witnesses are too numerous to cite in full, for the axiom 'the intellect orders all things' is attributed to Anaxagoras by convention, as is the nickname, 'Mr. *Nous*'.¹⁶ So Diogenes Laertius reports at the outset of his treatment of Anaxagoras in his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*:

Anaxagoras, the son of Hegesibulus or Eubulus, was a native of Clazomenae. He was a pupil of Anaximenes, and was the first who set mind above matter, for at the beginning of his treatise, which is composed in attractive and dignified language, he says, 'All things were together (πάντα χρήματα ἦν ὁμοῦ); then came Mind and set them in order (εἶτα νοῦς ἐλθὼν αὐτὰ διεκόσμησε)'. This earned for Anaxagoras himself the nickname of *Nous* or Mind (παρὸ καὶ Νοῦς ἐπεκλήθη).¹⁷

Hippolytus, a Christian writing in the early third century C.E., similarly introduces Anaxagoras in his list of early Greek natural philosophers: 'After this comes Anaxagoras, son of Hegesibulus, a native of Clazomenae. This person said the origin of all things is mind and matter—mind being the maker and matter that which is formed. For as all things were together (ὄντων γὰρ πάντων ὁμοῦ), mind arrived and ordered them (νοῦς ἐπελθὼν διεκόσμησεν)'.¹⁸

Although Anaxagoras is prominently associated with this doctrine, it is still sometimes linked explicitly, and even exclusively, with Plato. For instance, the second-century C.E. Middle-Platonic philosopher Alcinous, in his *Handbook of Platonism* (or

¹⁶ See Patricia Curd, 'Minding Things: The Workings of *Nous*', in *Anaxagoras of Clazomenae: Fragments and Testamonia; A Text and Translation with Notes and Essays by Patricia Curd* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 192-205. See also Stephen Menn's chapter, '*Nous* in Anaxagoras and other Pre-Socratics', in *Plato on God as *Nous** (Journal of the History of Philosophy Monograph Series; South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 1995), pp. 25-33.

¹⁷ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 2.3 (Hicks, LCL). Cf. Sextus Empiricus (late second- or early third-century C.E.), *Against the Mathematicians* 9.6, which attributes the same saying to Anaxagoras.

¹⁸ Hippolytus, *Haer.* 1.8.

Didaskalikos), reproduces key features of Anaxagoras' theory but attributes the teaching to Plato alone:¹⁹

[The primary god] is the Father through being the cause of all things and bestowing order on the heavenly Intellect and the soul of the world in accordance with himself and his own thoughts (κοσμεῖν τὸν οὐράνιον νοῦν καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ κόσμου πρὸς ἑαυτὸν καὶ πρὸς τὰς ἑαυτοῦ νοήσεις). By his own will he has filled all things with himself, as being the cause of its intellect (τοῦ νοῦ αὐτῆς αἴτιος ὑπάρχων). It is this latter [i.e. 'intellect'] that, set in order by the Father, itself imposes order on all nature in this world (ὅς κοσμηθεὶς ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς διακοσμεῖ σύμπασαν φύσιν ἐν τῷδε τῷ κόσμῳ).²⁰

Other authors rely on Plato as the sole source for Anaxagoras' teaching, though they do properly credit Anaxagoras as its originator. Thus in Book 14 of Eusebius' *Preparation for the Gospel*, as he discusses 'the remaining sects of those who have been famed for philosophy among the Greeks', Eusebius treats Anaxagoras and his doctrine that 'intellect orders all things' by simply quoting directly and at length from the passages in *Phaedo* cited above (*Praep. ev.* 14.15).

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Justin himself appears to betray familiarity with Anaxagoras' theory in his *I Apology*, though he too associates it exclusively with Plato. In *I Apology* 20.4.2 Justin writes: 'For in saying that all things have been created and ordered (πάντα κεκοσμηῆσθαι καὶ γεγενῆσθαι) by God, we seem to speak according to the doctrine of Plato (Πλάτωνος δόξομεν λέγειν δόγμα)'. Justin does not of course identify νοῦς as the force behind the ordering of creation but rather God, but this corresponds with his point. In speaking of a divine power ordering the cosmos, and with the verb κοσμέω specifically, he might seem to be reiterating Platonic teaching when in fact his claims are Christian. I take

¹⁹ There is now a consensus that Alcinous is not to be equated with Albinus, but dating Alcinous remains difficult. In John Dillon's estimation, Alcinous 'fits most comfortably into a period bounded by the writings of Plutarch on the one hand, and Galen and Alexander of Aphrodisias on the other, with Apuleius, Albinus, Atticus, Numenius, the Peripatetic Aspasius, and the Platonizing sophist Maximus of Tyre as approximate contemporaries' (*Alcinous: The Handbook of Platonism; Translated with an Introduction and Commentary by John Dillon* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002], p. xiii). Such a date would also make Alcinous a contemporary of Justin and perhaps a representative of similar sources of influence. That Justin reflects a 'Middle Platonism' akin to that of Alcinous and others is well known. See esp. M. J. Edwards, 'On the Platonic Schooling of Justin Martyr', *JTS* 42 (1991): pp. 17-34.

²⁰ *Handbook of Platonism* 10.3 (trans. John Dillon, *Alcinous: The Handbook of Platonism*).

this passage to be direct evidence that Justin's crafting of the old man's question in *Dial.* 4.1 is not an accidental echo of an otherwise well-known Platonic (or Anaxagorean) tradition. It rather appears that by fashioning the old man's rejoinder in *Dial.* 4.1 as he does, Justin is, in the character of the old man, cunningly usurping his own erstwhile Platonic idiom.

AN INTELLECT ORDERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE QUESTION OF JUSTIN'S CHRISTIAN EPISTEMOLOGY

While identifying the allusion in 4.1 is of value insofar as it further amplifies the thick texture of Platonic language in this portion of the *Dialogue*, more meaningful than simply taking stock of allusions is the consideration of their significance. In his analysis of the nature of Justin's interaction with Platonism in these introductory chapters of the *Dialogue*, M. J. Edwards notes that '[e]ven when [Justin] is speaking as a Platonist, his language, impregnated as it is with the classic phrases, often turns them to a new purpose'.²¹ Turning Platonic language to a new purpose is precisely what is going on in Justin's wording of the old man's final question in *Dial.* 4.1—'Or will the human mind (νοῦς) ever see God if it has not been ordered (κεκοσμημένος) by the Holy Spirit?'. By evoking the image of an ordering divine force with the terms νοῦς and κοσμέω, particularly in the context of a dispute regarding the legitimacy of Platonic teaching, the old man's question is indeed, like the entirety of the surrounding discussion, impregnated with Platonic language. But, insofar as the old man's question superimposes a Christian framework on that language with the addition of the Holy Spirit, it unquestionably puts it to a new purpose, namely, the undermining of Platonic epistemology.

The epistemology promoted by the unconverted Justin in 3.7 and then again in his rejoinder in 4.1 is standard Platonic fare. The divine is not to be perceived by physical senses

²¹ Edwards, 'On the Platonic Schooling of Justin Martyr', p. 21. Edwards additionally remarks that the 'the proem to the *Dialogue with Trypho* is...the work of one who retains an accurate recollection of Plato's teaching, and who writes for those to whom Plato's works were known' (p. 21). Edwards also reads the proem as 'inverting the plan of [Plato's] *Phaedrus*' (p. 20).

but by the intellect alone, which is capable of such apprehension because of its affinity with that which designed it (3.7-4.1). Since the human νοῦς is a species of the divine Νοῦς, the human νοῦς has within it a capacity, even a disposition, to know its maker. Implicit in the old man's final question are fundamentally contrary assumptions. The crucial addition to the old man's question is of course the Holy Spirit, who appears at this point in the discussion as something of a Trojan horse (and hence is perhaps best left translated 'a holy spirit').²² Justin does not inquire as to who or what this πνεῦμα mentioned by the old man is, but he cannot possibly know its true identity at this point,²³ and so he simply passes over this key element in the old man's reply.

The implied answer to the man's question is quite evident: No, the human mind cannot see God without being ordered by this so-called 'holy spirit'. The fact that the old man's question leaves open the possibility of apprehending God via the Holy Spirit is the crucial point.²⁴ As will later become clear, the πνεῦμα about which the old man speaks is the same Spirit of God who inspired the prophets of old:

‘A long time ago’, he replied, ‘long before the time of those so-called philosophers, there lived blessed men who were just and loved by God, men who spoke through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.... We call these men prophets. They alone knew the truth and communicated it to humanity.... They spoke only what they heard and what they saw while being filled with the Holy Spirit (ἃ ἤκουσαν καὶ ἃ εἶδον ἀγίῳ πληρωθέντες πνεύματι)’ (7.1).

These prophets thus embody the definite answer to the old man's question in 4.1: God can be seen and truth about God known, but only through the intervention of God's Holy Spirit to infuse a new order of knowing. In epistemological terms, the old man is therefore clearly affirming that humans can 'speculate correctly or speak truly of God'—to borrow Justin's

²² The absence of the article is noteworthy. Of the 29 references to the Holy Spirit in the text, 26 have the article. The three occurrences that lack it are in the early portions of the *Dialogue* (4.1; 7.1; 29.1).

²³ As Bobichon notes, the final expression μὴ ἀγίῳ πνεύματι κεκοσμημένος 'intervient ici de façon surprenante' (*Justin Martyr: Dialogue avec Tryphon: Vol 2*, p. 586).

²⁴ This fact also speaks against Hyldahl's conjecture that the inclusion of the Holy Spirit here is a corruption. As van Winden notes, 'Apparently the old man argues that the human mind is *from itself* unable to see God. That is why he adds the words which Hyldahl wishes to remove. They embody a restriction whereby the old man keeps open the possibility of another source of knowledge. This, in fact, comes to the fore, when he speaks of the prophets' (*An Early Christian Philosopher*, p. 70).

own language in 3.7. But he is also establishing an alternative order of knowledge in which human speech about the divine becomes possible, an order of knowledge in which the Spirit is integral to the human capability to apprehend—or ‘to see and hear’—God.²⁵ Whereas the Platonist understands the human νοῦς to be a creature of the cosmic Νοῦς and so, in accordance with the principle that ‘like perceives like’, competent to know the divine apart from any external intervention, the old man’s question assumes an opposing epistemological framework. The human νοῦς can indeed know the divine, but only when it has been ordered by a holy πνεῦμα, a πνεῦμα which is otherwise not inherent to humanity and so must be gifted by God.²⁶

At this point we find ourselves entering a debate, albeit from a different angle, that stretches back now several decades in scholarship on the *Dialogue* and concerns the epistemology being advanced by Justin in this work. This debate has concentrated on Justin’s repeated reference to a special χάρις that has been granted to Christians, enabling them to perceive scripture’s hidden interpretive mysteries.²⁷ This χάρις is variously referred to as a ‘grace to understand’ (χάρις τοῦ νοῆσαι)²⁸ or a ‘grace to know’ (χάρις τοῦ γινῶναι).²⁹ When one receives the intellectual endowment afforded by this ‘grace to understand’, then scripture

²⁵ So Anthony Briggman: ‘The adorning activity of the Spirit in 4,1 enables one to see God, and the reader presumes, enables one to hear from God as well... Therefore, the Spirit is a source of knowledge other than the human mind, the source of knowledge that grants insight into divine things’ (‘Measuring Justin’s Approach to the Spirit: Trinitarian Conviction and Binitarian Orientation’ *VC* 63 [2009]: pp. 107-37, pp. 117-18).

²⁶ It should be noted that although description of the human mind needing to be ‘ordered’ by the Holy Spirit in order to see God seems primarily to emphasize the need for cognitive repair or supplement, a sense of moral improvement or transformation may also be in view with the use of the verb κοσμέω. The subsequent discussion does in fact turn in 4.3 to the subject of virtue as a prerequisite for seeing God. Cf. Plato’s *Phaed.* 114e, which describes the ‘ordering’ or ‘adornment’ of the soul with virtues. Cf. also Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.*

3.11.64.1, which also describes the soul ‘being adorned/ordered by the Holy Spirit’ (κεκοσμημένος ψυχῆ ἁγίῳ πνεύματι) with various virtues. The Stoic Chrysippus, an erstwhile student of Plato’s Academy (see Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, 7.184-85), also seems to associate mental ordering with virtuous living: ‘And among living things the human is best, having been arranged in a superior way in virtue according to the ordering of the mind (κεκοσμημένον ἀρετῇ διαφόρως κατὰ τὴν τοῦ νοῦ σύστασιν)’ (*Fragmenta logica et physica* 1009 [57]). Identical language is found in Pseudo-Plutarch, *The Doctrines of the Philosophers* 880d.

²⁷ The term χάρις appears 29 times in the *Dialogue*.

²⁸ *Dial.* 119.1.

²⁹ *Dial.* 30.1.

is no longer read as it previously had been—‘carnally’ (σαρκικῶς)³⁰ or ‘humbly’ (ταπεινῶς)³¹ or ‘unspiritually’ (χαμερπῶς)³² or ‘simply’ (ψιλῶς)³³—and instead it is read according to its ‘design’ (νόος)³⁴ and its ‘power’ (δύναμις).³⁵ As Justin explains to his Jewish interlocutor, ‘I intend to quote scriptures to you, but I do not strive after the merely artful organization of words, for such is not my strength. Rather a grace alone from God (χάρις παρὰ θεοῦ μόνη) was given to me in order to understand (εἰς τὸ συνιέναι) his scriptures, of which grace I invite all to share freely and abundantly’.³⁶ Similarly, in 92.1 Justin again explains the necessity of this exegetical χάρις: ‘If, therefore, one were not endowed with God’s great grace to understand (Εἰ οὖν τις μὴ μετὰ μεγάλης χάριτος τῆς παρὰ θεοῦ λάβοι νοῆσαι) the words and deeds of the prophets, it would be quite useless for him to relate their words and actions, when he can give no explanation of them’.

Nestor Pycke, in a 1961 article, argued that the ‘grace to understand’ in Justin designates a supernatural gift of charismatic illumination and that reception of this divine χάρις depends entirely on divine initiative, an epistemological condition and view of divine agency that seems at home with what is implied by the old man in 4.1.³⁷ This graced knowledge (‘connaissance de grâce’) described by Justin thus differs, according to Pycke, from the rational knowledge (‘connaissance rationnelle’) with which humans are otherwise naturally endowed, and this graced knowledge offers the only way for a reader to perceive

³⁰ *Dial.* 14.2.

³¹ *Dial.* 112.1, 4; 114.4.

³² *Dial.* 112.4; 114.4.

³³ *Dial.* 112.1.

³⁴ *Dial.* 29.2.

³⁵ *Dial.* 112.1.

³⁶ *Dial.* 58.1. Cf. 119.1.

³⁷ Nestor Pycke, ‘Connaissance rationnelle et connaissance de grâce chez saint Justin’, *ETL* 37 (1961): pp. 52-85. In characterizing Justin’s theological program Pycke writes, ‘Au point de départ de celle-ci se trouve la gnose du Christ, laquelle est rendue possible par la grâce, dont l’initiative vient non pas de l’homme, mais de Dieu’ (p. 85).

previously concealed scriptural meanings—meanings that remain veiled to readers such as Trypho.³⁸

In response to Pycke, Robert Joly countered that the ‘grace to understand’ in Justin does not at all stand apart from natural or rational knowledge.³⁹ In fact, it is nothing more than rational knowledge. As Joly points out, Justin’s scriptural demonstrations are always presented in rational terms, accessible to the unconverted, and so as commanding rational assent. In Joly’s judgment, ‘La raison et la grâce ne sont nullement en équilibre harmonieux chez Justin: la raison occupe la première place’.⁴⁰ There is, therefore, Joly insists, no need to associate the ‘grace to understand’ with an alternative or supernatural order of knowledge since it belongs to the discourse of rational proof. To disassociate this grace from purely rational argumentation would be, in fact, to undermine Justin’s repeated appeal to proof.

Joly would seem to have won this bout with Pycke on points with the support of Oskar Skarsaune in his landmark study, *The Proof from Prophecy*.⁴¹ Commending Joly’s critique of Pycke and building on Joly’s observations regarding the ‘entirely rational contents of this knowledge’,⁴² Skarsaune concludes that the phrase ‘grace to understand’ in Justin refers to nothing more than the apostolic tradition of scriptural exegesis—or that interpretive tradition that was ‘taught by Christ to the apostles and transmitted to all Christians’.⁴³ The ‘grace to understand’ is thus a gift that is manifested and transmitted in universally accessible

³⁸ Similarly, David E. Aune argues that for Justin Christians are, like the Old Testament prophets, privileged recipients of ‘charismatic illumination’ (‘Justin Martyr’s Use of the Old Testament’, *BETS* 9 (1966): pp. 179-97, 182, 186-87).

³⁹ Robert Joly, *Christianisme et Philosophie: Études sur Justin et les Apologues grecs du deuxième siècle* (Bruxelles: l’Université de Bruxelles, 1973), pp. 104-13.

⁴⁰ Joly, *Christianisme et Philosophie*, 112. For critique of Joly on this matter, see C. J. de Vogel, ‘Problems Concerning Justin Martyr: Did Justin find a Certain Continuity between Greek Philosophy and Christian Faith?’ *Mnemosyne* 31 (1978): pp. 360-88, esp. 365-67. According to Vogel, Joly presents ‘a picture of a Justin rationalist which results from a serious misunderstanding of Justin’s way of arguing’ (p. 365).

⁴¹ Oskar Skarsaune, *The Proof from Prophecy: A Study in Justin Martyr’s Proof-Text Tradition. Text-Type, Provenance, Theological Profile* (NovTSup 56; Leiden: Brill, 1987).

⁴² Skarsaune, *The Proof from Prophecy*, p. 12.

⁴³ Skarsaune, *The Proof from Prophecy*, p. 12. Joly equates the ‘grace to understand’ more flexibly with the typological approach to interpretation.

propositional terms. This exegetical χάρις should, therefore, be viewed as coextensive with rational argument and so as independent of any form of ongoing divine intervention.⁴⁴

Joly and Skarsaune are correct in one key particular. Justin unquestionably presents his exegetical claims as based on a tradition of reasoning inaugurated by Jesus himself and, moreover, as entirely rational and convincing. As Justin himself states, ‘For after Jesus was crucified, his disciples who were with him were scattered until he rose from the dead and had convinced (πέπεικεν) them that it had been predicted that he would suffer. And thus being convinced (πεισθέντες), they went out into the entire world and taught these things’ (*Dial.* 53.5). Christian scriptural claims are thus envisioned by Justin as stemming from the convincing demonstrations of Christ himself, which were then disseminated through apostolic tradition and presented as unassailable proofs. As Gregory Snyder notes, across the whole of the *Dialogue* ‘language of persuasion and most of all “proof” (ἀπόδειξις, ἀποδείκνυμι) is ubiquitous’⁴⁵ and, ‘for Justin, the person who remains unmoved by so many clear and evident homologies between the prophecies and their fulfillment in Christ must be considered willfully perverse’.⁴⁶ But is not this emphasis on the rationality and persuasiveness of Christian theological claims in conflict with what is seemingly implied by the old man’s question in 4.1, namely, that divine truth is only comprehended by means of an order of knowledge granted exclusively by God’s Spirit?

Perhaps it could be claimed that the ideas expressed by the old man should not be equated with Justin’s own. But insofar as the old man is presented in the *Dialogue* as the impetus for Justin’s conversion and an otherwise reliable arbiter of truth—if not an epiphany

⁴⁴ Skarsaune’s view has been endorsed by more recent scholars. See esp. Brevard S. Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 34, 37, 42; Frances Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 122-23.

⁴⁵ H. Gregory Snyder, ‘The Classroom in the Text: Exegetical Practices in Justin and Galen’, in *Christian Origins and Greco-Roman Culture: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013), pp. 663-85, 664.

⁴⁶ Snyder, ‘The Classroom in the Text’, p. 683.

of Christ himself—it is difficult to imagine that the Christian Justin does not himself affirm the old man’s implied reasoning. Justin is, in fact, responsible for composing it.⁴⁷

Furthermore, the necessity of spiritual illumination in 4.1 is not an anomaly in the *Dialogue*. The old man again emphasizes charismatic illumination at the very conclusion of his address to Justin in 7.3, and in even more certain terms: ‘Above all, beseech God to open to you the gates of light, for no one can perceive or understand these truths unless he or she has been enlightened by God and his Christ’.⁴⁸ The ‘truths’ in this instance are those that were communicated by the prophets of old but, as the old man previously made clear, these prophets did not communicate in accord with the usual standards of logical or philosophical reasoning. As he explains, ‘In their writings they gave no proof (οὐ...μετὰ ἀποδείξεως) at that time of their statements, for, as reliable witnesses of the truth, they were beyond proof (ἀνωτέρω πάσης ἀποδείξεως)’ (7.2). It is also significant that the old man does not leave Justin with a final scriptural demonstration but instead with an invitation to prayer and the hope of divine illumination. Such illumination is precisely what Justin is granted.

Immediately after the old man’s invitation to prayer Justin depicts his conversion to the Christian philosophy as an experience of ‘being set on fire’ (πῦρ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ ἀνήφθη) and ‘being seized by an affection (ἔρωσ ἔχει με) for the prophets and for those who are friends of Christ’ (8.1)—hardly expressions of dispassionate rational persuasion.⁴⁹ Justin’s depiction of

⁴⁷ For the old man as Christ, see Andrew Hofer, ‘The Old Man as Christ in Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho*’, *VC* 57 (2003): pp. 1-21. As Skarsaune elsewhere notes, ‘There can be no doubt that this figure is to a great extent a spokesman for Justin himself... The Old Man is saying what Justin himself at this point in his work wanted to say to his readers’ (‘The Conversion of Justin Martyr’, *ST* 30 [1976]: pp. 53-73, 68). Runar M. Thorsteinsson even suggests that ‘Justin may have intended his readers to see characteristics of Justin himself in the figure of the “old man”. In other words, the “Christian Socrates” depicted in chapters 3-8 is none other than Justin the Christian philosopher conversing with his former self’ (‘By Philosophy Alone: Reassessing Justin’s Christianity and His Turn from Platonism’, *Early Christianity* 3 [2012]: pp. 492-517, 503).

⁴⁸ Again, for the ‘gates of light’ as an image of divine illumination, see Cacciari, ‘In margine a Giustino, *dial.* vii, 3’. Cf. Origen, *Cels.* 2.67.23. Justin also elsewhere indicates quiet clearly that reception of God’s ‘grace to know’ comes at God’s initiative: “‘Do you, gentlemen, suppose”, I continued, “that we could have comprehended (νενοικῆναι δυνηθῆναι) these things in the scriptures unless we received the grace to know by the will of the one who willed these things (εἰ μὴ θελήματι τοῦ θελήσαντος αὐτὰ ἐλάβομεν χάριν τοῦ νοῆσαι)?”’ (119.1).

⁴⁹ Skarsaune remarks that for Justin ‘the process of conversion seems to be one of rational argumentation, leading step by step from Platonism to Christianity’ (‘The Conversion of Justin Martyr’, p. 53). Justin’s own

his soul being ‘set on fire’ is particularly significant because in *Dial.* 88.3 he uses this exact language to describe the waters of the Jordan being ‘set on fire’ (πῦρ ἀνήφθη) when the Spirit descended upon Jesus at his baptism.⁵⁰ With this phrase Justin is depicting his own initial reception of the Spirit as a sort of charismatic kindling much like that experienced by Jesus in the inaugural moment of his ministry. The Spirit’s involvement in prophetic inspiration is likewise represented by Justin in ways that stretch the bounds of unsupplemented human rationality, as in the case of the prophet Zechariah, who is said by Justin to prophesy ‘not in a normal state, but in ecstasy (ἐν ἔκστασει)’ (115.3).⁵¹ Such an ‘ecstatic’ understanding of inspiration was widespread in antiquity, particularly among Platonists, and there is no reason to presume that Justin ‘was not a child of his time in his theory of prophetic madness’.⁵² Even in places where something like mania or ecstasy is not explicitly in view, the prophets are

claims here in 8.1, however, certainly seem to indicate, as Graham Stanton’s observes, ‘the extent to which there is a very strong experiential basis to Justin’s conversion’ (‘The Spirit in the Writings of Justin Martyr’ in *The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins: Essays in Honor of James D. G. Dunn* [ed. G. N. Stanton, B. W. Longenecker, and S. C. Barton; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004], pp. 321-34, p. 325).

⁵⁰ Cf. perhaps Matt. 3:11//Luke 3:16.

⁵¹ See also the depiction of Daniel in 31.7. It must be admitted that the relation of a term such as ἔκστασις to ‘rationality’ is complicated in the ancient world. David Aune (*Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* [Grand Rapids, 1983], pp. 19-20), for instance, distinguishes between two forms of ecstatic consciousness: ‘possession trance’ and ‘vision trance’. In possession trance, the prophetic subject is completely passive. In vision trance, however, the soul rises temporarily from the body but retains some command of its cognitive faculties. There are in fact multiple instances in Jewish and Christian literature where a subject’s consciousness or rationality is heightened, even in states described as ‘ecstatic’. See, for instance, David Winston, ‘Two Types of Mosaic Prophecy According to Philo’, *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* (1988): pp. 442-455. This essay was later published in *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 2 (1989): pp. 49-67. See also John R. Levinson, ‘Two Types of Ecstatic Prophecy According to Philo’, *The Studia Philonica Annual* 6 (1994): pp. 83-89. Even in states which we might term ‘rational ecstasy’, it is still the case that a divine or spiritual power possesses the human subject, altering, or heightening, or supplementing, or working alongside the human’s rational powers.

⁵² Erwin R. Goodenough, *The Theology of Justin Martyr: An Investigation into the Conceptions of Early Christian Literature and Its Hellenistic and Judaistic Influences* (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1968), pp. 177. For descriptions of the non-rational nature of inspiration, see e.g. the typology of prophetic ecstasy in Plato, *Phaedr.* 244a-245c; see also *Tim.* 71e; *Ion* 534c-d; *Apol.* 22c; *Meno* 99c. For a description of prophetic possession in which some form of human rationality is retained, see Plutarch, *Pyth. orac.* 397b-c. Cicero’s *De divinatione* also offers snapshots of alternative understandings. Cf. the typology of madness in Philo, *Who is the Heir?* 249-263, which is modelled on Plato’s account in *Phaedrus*. Philo’s fourth type of madness is associated with the prophets: ‘it is a divinely inspired and more vehement sort of enthusiasm, which the race of the prophets is subject to’ (*Who is the Heir?* 258-59). Philo repeatedly characterizes the prophets (and sometimes himself) as subjects whose rationality and agency are seized and overcome by an exterior, divine force. See e.g. *Special Laws* 1.65; 3.1-6; 4.49; *On Dreams* 2.250-54; *On Cherubim* 27-28; *On the Migration of Abraham* 34-35.

still never pictured as self-reliant agents.⁵³ The idea of divine involvement in human action, and even divine possession of human agency, is simply pervasive in the *Dialogue* and is in no way diminished by a corresponding emphasis on the rationality of Christian claims.

CONCLUSION: DIVINE AND HUMAN AGENCY IN THE *DIALOGUE*

The question of the relationship between ordinary human knowledge and the Spirit's supplementary cognitive ordering should now be sharpened. Plainly stated, are rational persuasion and spiritual illumination necessarily opposed to one another? Or, posed slightly differently, is the relationship between 'connaissance rationnelle' and 'connaissance de grâce'—to borrow the distinction in Pycke's article—necessarily a zero-sum affair? If Justin is to be found coherent, such questions must be answered in the negative. And so, rather than elevate one to the near exclusion of the other (as Joly and Skarsaune appear to do), or disregard what is textually unavoidable (as Joly and Skarsaune might accuse Pycke of doing), we should consider how both rational persuasion and a Spirit-enacted ordering of the human intellect perhaps coincide in Justin's epistemological understanding.⁵⁴

The fact that human and divine agencies so frequently stand alongside one another in the *Dialogue* is evident in the very architecture of Justin's conversation with the old man, which intertwines reasoned philosophical argumentation regarding the relative merits of Christianity and Platonism with descriptions of the necessity of spiritual illumination for comprehending Christian truth. We see this intertwining again in Justin's promise to Trypho immediately after the account of his own conversion: 'I will prove to you, here and now, that

⁵³ See e.g. *Dial.* 34.1. Cf. *1 Apol.* 36. The phrase 'prophetic Spirit' is Justin's preferred way of referring to the Spirit. See the discussion of this title in Stanton, 'The Spirit in the Writings of Justin', pp. 326-29.

⁵⁴ Vogel is the one scholar most aware of the important of coincidence here. He writes, 'Justin used the term "philosophy" not only in the former sense, but also for *revealed truth* which was, according to his own inner experience, a truth to be understood with the intellect, if only that intellect were "illuminated". And here we touch on the point where some misunderstanding could arise from Justin's constant appeal to reason and to the senses.... Justin knew quite well that, in order to understand the "hard facts" of history, the intellect needs some "illumination" ('Problems Concerning Justin Martyr', p. 367).

we do not believe in groundless myths nor in teachings not based on reason (ἀναποδείκτοις λόγοις), but in doctrines that are full of the Spirit of God (μεστοῖς πνεύματος θείου), teeming with power (δυνάμει βρούουσι), and flourishing with grace (τεθηλόσι χάριτι)' (9.1). The promise of proof and reason here concurs with the promise that Christian teaching is spiritually inspired, powerful, and a source of overflowing grace. Justin simply does not disentangle the rationality of Christian teaching from the divine power that infuses it.

The conjunction of rational proof and the Spirit's inspiring work is also important for appreciating the true nature of the disagreement between Justin and Trypho. The *Dialogue* is clearly promoted as an exegetical dispute, the presumption being that it is to be decided on exegetical terms. But despite the ways in which exegetical terms govern the form of the discussion, it is critical to acknowledge that whatever Trypho and Justin may pretend they are doing in debating scripture, their fundamental disagreement is not one of textual meaning, nor is it to be resolved by reasoning alone. What really divides the two—and so what the *Dialogue* is really about—is the ultimate authority to which each submits (Torah or Christ) and the accompanying question of which tradition (Judaism or Christianity) is now the authentic locus of God's Spirit.⁵⁵ The debate is then not about who is a better interpreter of the biblical text in a purely exegetical sense. It is about the ultimate validity of life according to Torah or life according to Christ. This is precisely why Justin, somewhat wearily, concedes that Trypho is not likely to be convinced by his claims:

I know that, as the word of God says, the great wisdom of the almighty God who created all things has been hidden from you. Therefore with pity for you, I struggle to work harder, so that you might understand our paradoxes, but if not, I shall be

⁵⁵ Bruce Chilton astutely characterizes this aspect of the *Dialogue*: 'So what is presented by Justin as a meeting of minds is in the event a missing of minds. Both Judaism and Christianity made the immediate reference to scripture ancillary to its systemic significance. But because Christianity was committed to the *Logos* as its systemic center, and Judaism to the Torah as its systemic center, the two could not understand one another. Any objection from one side to the other seems silly: it misses the point. In the absence of a language to discuss the systemic relationship, the two sides fell to disputing which made better sense of the immediate reference (the "literal meaning", as would be said today) of the texts concerned. What is billed as a dialogue is really a shadow play: learned leaders reinforcing their own positions by arguing over what neither side believes really matters' ('Justin and Israelite Prophecy', in *Justin Martyr and his Worlds* [ed. Sara Parvis and Paul Foster; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007], pp. 77-87, 87).

innocent on the day of judgment. For you shall hear other words which appear still more paradoxical. But do not be disturbed; rather become more eager listeners and stay as investigators, disregarding the traditions of your teachers.⁵⁶

As Justin sees it, Trypho's problem is not that he lacks exegetical competence or that his own readings are interpretively incoherent, which they are not. Trypho's problem is that his intellect has not been ordered by God's Spirit to see the persuasive rationality of the newly revealed Christian way of life and the prophetic anticipations of this way of life in Trypho's own Jewish text. Trypho cannot see this rationality or experience this ordering because it is only found within that way of life where God's transforming Spirit now dwells—that tradition to which the 'prophetic charisms' (προφητικὰ χαρίσματα) that once animated Israel's prophets have been 'transferred' (μετετέθη) (82.1). This is why Justin calls on Trypho to abandon Jewish tradition: 'Unless you detest the doctrines of those proud teachers who aspire to be called Rabbi, and apply yourself with such persistence and intelligence to the words of the prophets that you suffer the same indignities from the hands of your people as the prophets did, you cannot derive any benefit from the prophetic writings' (112.5). And it is also why he concludes the *Dialogue* in prayer: 'And in turn I prayed for them, saying, "I can wish you no greater blessing than this, gentlemen, that, realizing that wisdom is given to every man through this way, you also may one day come to believe entirely as we do that Jesus is the Christ of God"' (142.3). For Justin, 'connaissance de grâce' and 'connaissance rationnelle'—the respective epistemological motions of divine and human agency—coincide in the same act: submission to the Christian way of life. This submission is simultaneously the consequence of divine intervention and a human act of cognitive volition. Thus reason and revelation concur. Such is simply the paradox of Christian knowledge.

⁵⁶ *Dial.* 38.2.

