

The Ontological and Epistemological Foundations for Ethics

The ambiguity of the modern concept Gnosticism has rendered the term problematic to use in detailed studies into ancient Christianity. However, the importance of the concept *gnosis* in ancient religion and philosophy should not be underappreciated on account of previous erroneous terminological concerns. Knowledge was equal both to godliness and virtue among many, Christians, Jews, and pagans alike.¹ Epistemology and ethics were intimately intertwined in ancient thought. A knowledgeable person was a virtuous person. In *TriTrac*, knowledge of God is equal to salvation (55:27–40, 126:9–27), bringing joy and delight (123:4–10). This is in line with what Plato maintained, that knowledge of the self equaled knowledge of God, and God was good. Many followed suit, like Plotinus who argued that contemplation of one's *nous* was equal to contemplating God since they were one and the same.² Stoics maintained that becoming a virtuous person entailed being totally integrated with the divine Logos, which permeated the world. Thus, quite understandably, ontology and ethics were intimately linked. As one Stoic is said to have put it: “physical speculation is to be adopted for no other purpose than for the differentiation of good and bad things”.³ However, ontology, or ‘the science of being’, was not at all unimportant for ‘dualists’ either. In this chapter, we explore how knowledge

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- 1 The importance of the concept of *gnosis* has certainly not been neglected by previous scholarship. See for example Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*; Rudolph, *Gnosis*. A problem with early studies into the way *gnosis* was conceptualized in antiquity is the harmonization of different texts and groups and the reifying of ‘Gnostics’ and a ‘Gnostic religion’. At the Messina Conference 1966 scholars decided to separate *gnosis* from ‘Gnosticism’. *Gnosis* was defined as “knowledge of the divine reserved for an elite”, ultimately a universal concept, while Gnosticism was a much more specific kind of world view held by different people in the first centuries, which included a specific mythology, anthropology, and soteriology. For details, see Ugo Bianchi, ed., *Le origini dello gnosticismo: Colloquio di Messina 13–18 Aprile 1966* (Leiden: Brill, 1967 [1970]). For a summary of the history of the study of Gnosticism, the events leading up to the Messina Conference, and the splits into different “schools” after it, see Antti Marjanen “What is Gnosticism? From the Pastorals to Rudolph”, in *Was There a Gnostic Religion*, ed. Antti Marjanen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2005), 1–53.
 - 2 Plotinus, *Ennead* V.3–4, 7.
 - 3 SVF III.68. Translation by A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers, Vol. 1: Translations of the Principal Sources, with Philosophical Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 369.

is conceptualized in *TriTrac* and what ontological foundations are presented. This chapter answers the questions: What are the foundations for existence in the cosmos? How is knowledge retained? And how are ontology and epistemology linked to ethics?

1 Knowledge in *TriTrac* and Ancient Epistemology

Knowledge in *TriTrac* is associated with God.⁴ No one can know God without his permission (126:9–27). It is through the Son, who is at times knowledge of the Father himself, that the Father makes himself known (67:12–13, 87:15). Knowledge and understanding is a state granted by the Son to the Aeons of the Pleroma (65:14–31) and knowledge has a salvific function in the text. The Savior places in the Logos “a word which is destined to be knowledge” (ἄνουλογος εἴηται ἄνουεπιστήμη) (88:22–23). When the Savior appears to the Logos he begins to act “in wisdom and knowledge” (ἐν σοφίᾳ ἐν οὔεπιστήμῃ) (91:2–3). Here it seems that knowledge is not retained by oneself but given by God.⁵ As seen in the paraphrase of the myth of *TriTrac* in the introductory chapter, the Logos’ creation happens in three stages: first matter is created, then psychic stuff, and lastly pneuma. Throughout *TriTrac* it is clear that a part of this creation stands in opposition to knowledge and does not have access to knowledge and understanding: matter. Matter and the powers associated with the first part of the Logos’ creation have come forth from “an imitation through an impression” (οὐταντῆ ἀβαλ ἐν οὐφαντασίᾳ) (98:5).⁶ We read that “there is no knowledge for the ones who have come forth from them” (μὴν οὐκαὶνεῖ ἄνεταῦεἰ ἐβολ· ἄμοου) (98:8–9). Why is this? And what about the other substances and their association with knowledge? These questions are important if we are to approach an understanding of the basis for the ethical system proposed in *TriTrac*, because these three substances later make up humanity. To understand why “an imitation through an impression” cannot pertain to true knowledge—and to understand why it is important for discussions on ethics—we need to make a short survey of the field of ancient epistemology.

4 The term ἐπιστήμη/εἰπιστήμη is used four times in *TriTrac* (68:12–13, 68:15, 88:23, 91:2–3), but Coptic equivalents like καὶνε (and its variants), seem to be used interchangeably. καὶνε occurs over fifty times. See Attridge and Pagels, “The Tripartite Tractate,” in *Notes*, 362–363.

5 Compare 1 Cor 12:8.

6 I will translate the words φαντασία with “impression” and ταντῆ with “imitation”/“phantasm,” throughout, the reasons for which will become apparent in the present chapter. Attridge and Pagels’ have no uniform way of treating these words, and thus my treatment of the words, and their translation, differs from theirs.

In order to be able to know what is good, not just the appearance of good, but true virtue, one first needed to be able to discern truth from falsehood. This issue, the ability to recognize truth from falsehood, was at the core of ancient epistemology.⁷ Possessing this ability meant the difference between an ignorant person and a knowledgeable person and, by extension, a virtuous person and a person only appearing virtuous. This is the way Socrates, the wisest of them all, was portrayed by Plato.⁸ Many of the Platonic dialogues are devoted to the question of how one discerns the mere appearance of virtue, justice, or piety—just to name a few concepts dissected by Plato—from true virtue, justice, and piety. Plato made an important distinction between things that seem to have a particular property and the property itself. He discussed, among other things, the nature of Beauty and maintained that pretenders are only interested in appearances, in beautiful *things*, not the deeper truth, Beauty itself.⁹ That which pertains to appearance is mere belief (*δόξα*) while knowledge (*ἐπιστήμη*) pertains to deeper truth;¹⁰ hence Plato's theory of Forms. Knowledge was retained through the art of dialectic. In books five through seven of *The Republic*, Plato describes the educational background, chiefly dealing with mathematics, that could lead one to be capable of contemplating the Forms, a process that only a select few ever undergo.¹¹ As is well known, Plato's thoughts gave rise to a large following, and great interest was shown in Plato's concept of "becoming godlike" (*ὁμοίωσις θεῶν*).¹² There were different interpretations of what Plato could have meant with the concept of "becoming godlike", but because Plato equated the good with the divine, most

7 For an introduction to ancient approach to the question of how knowledge was defined, see Lloyd P. Gerson, *Ancient Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

8 In a discussion with a man who claimed to know what was Good, although he knew nothing, Socrates exclaimed that he did not know what Good was either but at least he knew that much (Plato, *Apology of Socrates* 21d).

9 Plato, *The Republic* VII.

10 For a detailed discussion of Plato's epistemology, see Gerson, *Ancient Epistemology*, 27–61.

11 Plato, as is commonly recognized, constantly reworked and reconsidered his thoughts and ideas, which caused his works to differ in details. For a work that studies Plato's epistemology from the perspective of several of Plato's *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *The Republic*, and *Theaetetus*, see Elizabeth A. Laidlaw-Johnson, *Plato's Epistemology: How Hard is it to Know?* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 1996).

12 Plato, *Theaetetus* 176a–b; *Phaedo* 82b10–11. For this concept in Plato, see John M. Armstrong, "After the Ascent: Plato on Becoming like God", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 26 (2004): 171–183. For a recent discussion of the impact of Plato's concept of "becoming godlike", see Roig Lanzillotta, "A Way of Salvation", 73–81.

Middle Platonic thinkers seem to have interpreted it as a question of moral progress.¹³

Aristotle, as is well known, rejected Plato's thought on the Forms. Nevertheless, Aristotle also separated belief and knowledge. Knowledge could not be gained from sense perception; it had to be reasoned forth with the mind.¹⁴ Thus, Aristotle distinguished between thinking, which pertained to the mind, and sense perception which depended on the body and its functions—although the mind processed bodily experiences.¹⁵ The mind was needed for forming both knowledge and beliefs and it was the mind's ability to think that separated humans from animals.

Strict materialists—like Epicureans and Stoics—argued that the mind, just like thinking itself, was corporeal, material. These naturalists connected epistemology to the mechanics of human cognition. How did humans form mental representations in the first place? For naturalists, cognition was a bodily event.¹⁶ Epicurus, for example, thought that sense perceptions made images (εἰδῶλα) in the mind and that these images were based on appearances (τὰ φαινόμενα) that correlated with the outside world.¹⁷ Some Stoics described the mind as being like a tensional field (κίνησις τονική) on which the outside world made impressions.¹⁸ Perceiving something with the mind was the

13 For references to the Middle Platonists (like Philo and Stobaeus) see Roig Lanzilotta, "A Way of Salvation", 79.

14 The epistemology of Aristotle is a huge topic and cannot be discussed here in a way that would do it justice. For a summary, see Gerson, *Ancient Epistemology*, 62–89.

15 Aristotle, *On the Soul* III.4.429.

16 Epicurus went to the extreme and maintained that all sense perception was in one sense necessarily true. *Letter to Menoeceus* 10.31 2.

17 For the ancient references and translations to Epicurus' views on epistemology and theory of mind, see Long and Sedley, *Hellenistic Philosophers*, 72–86.

18 For ancient sources on Stoic views on epistemology and the workings of the mind in relation to the outside world, see SVF II.52, 55, 61; Long and Sedley, *Hellenistic Philosophers*, 236–241. There were of course differences in detail among all those who through ancient time claimed adherence to the Stoic school of philosophy, but Stoics generally agreed upon some basic tenets, as developed by early founders like Zeno and Chrysippus, such as materialism, causal determinism, and the importance for a virtuous person to merge one's mind to the divine Logos that permeated all existence. For an introduction to the basic differences between the classical Greek philosophical schools, and for translations of much of the ancient material on Stoics, see Long and Sedley, *Hellenistic Philosophers*, 7, and passim. See also Heinrich von Staden, "The Stoic Theory of Perception and its 'Platonic' Critics", in *Studies in Perception: Interrelations in the History of Philosophy and Science*, eds. Peter K. Machamer and Robert G. Turnbull (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1978), 96–136.

result of impressions (*φαντασία*) appearing in the mind.¹⁹ The tensional field of the mind merged with other tensional fields.²⁰ The mind was not just a blank sheet of paper on which the outside world made its impressions; rather, the structure of one's mind in part shaped the kind of impressions to which one was subjected, or rather created for oneself. An untrained mind was a tensional field in disarray, and such a mind was prone to experiencing and acting on false impressions (*φαντασία*).²¹ Knowledge only occurred if the mind was in harmonious sync with the divine reason that permeated all existence.

TriTrac's supposition that imitations and impressions are unable to retain true knowledge are related to these discussions. *TriTrac* utilizes these classical discussions on epistemology to present a particular view of different levels of corporeality, which correspond to different relations to knowledge. Let us begin with the text's ontology and by scrutinizing the way the text employs the technical terms pertaining to the ancient discussion of epistemology.

2 Imitations, Likenesses, and Images: the Ontology of *TriTrac* and the Question of Logos

In *TriTrac*, the creation of the cosmos and humanity is presented as coming about in three stages. The instigator throughout the creation process is the Logos, the youngest Aeon. But why is he called Logos? In many Valentinian systems the youngest Aeon is Sophia, Wisdom. Furthermore, Logos, in Greco-Roman philosophy often presented as the rationality of God, is a thoroughly positive force, a being that in *TriTrac* at times seems to act contrary to reason. In the first stage of creation, the Logos is confused on account of his isolation from the Pleroma of God and thus gives rise to matter (74:18–80:11), which causes suffering and passion. However, considering that it is highlighted throughout the text that this happens with the sanction and direction from the Father himself (77:10–11, 107:22, 109:7–11), and considering that the youngest Aeon plays the key role in organizing the whole of creation (always guiding

19 Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 11.84.

20 At least according to what Sextus Empiricus tells us of Chrysippus. Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians* 1.228–231.

21 For Stoics, the mind was thought to constantly be exposed to impressions, and a person with a weak character was in danger of giving in to sudden changes in the impressions. Thus, the principle of being of an unchanging character, firm, and at rest is paramount for the sage. See Gitte Buch-Hansen, *It is the Spirit that Gives Life: A Stoic Understanding of Pneuma in John's Gospel* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 80–82.

the Demiurge) and also instigating the appearance of the Savior (114:4–11), it is not strange at all, I would argue, that the youngest Aeon in this tractate is called Logos. In the cosmic system as it is presented in *TriTrac*, the youngest Aeon is an active force throughout, providing the whole system with order and purpose, and even though matter (Logos' first act) causes suffering, it has, as we shall see in detail further on, a very important pedagogical function. With such a view of the youngest Aeon, identifying it as Logos is actually, I would argue, the expected choice.²²

In the second stage of creation, the Logos turns away from this initial material creation and produces psychic substance (80:11–85:15). In the third and last stage of generating substances for the cosmos, the Savior appears and as a result of this the Logos produces pneumatic substance (90:14–95:38). The three substances that comprise the cosmos and humanity are thus: matter, psychê, and pneuma.

The term φαντασία, which will be translated as *impression*, occurs nine times in the *TriTrac*, and relates to the first part of creation, namely matter. Matter is referred to as impression but we also read that matter was created when the Logos acted on impressions.²³ The Stoics used this term to refer to the imprint in the mind that resulted in the process of thinking.²⁴ The first time the term is used in *TriTrac* it refers to the Logos' initial product, what later in the text is called the left side, associated with matter. We read that the Logos “abandoned that which came to be in the defect along with those who had come forth from him through an impression, since they are not his”.²⁵ What came out from the Logos, through an impression, is also defined as:

22 For Stoics, Logos was the rational principle permeating all existence. Philo presents Logos as the active force located in between the highest Father and cosmos, and other Middle Platonists viewed the Logos as the transcendental mind of God in the world (Maria Hillar, *From Logos to Trinity: The Evolution of Religious Beliefs from Pythagoras to Tertullian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Kenney, “The Platonism”). In the Gospel of John, we read that Logos creates the world and then became flesh (John 1). Even though the Savior (Son) and Logos are not identified with each other in *TriTrac*, we read that the Savior, Jesus Christ on earth, received his “flesh” from Logos at his incarnation (114:4–11). It is obvious that *TriTrac* is deeply invested in the philosophical Logos speculations of the time and what we have in *TriTrac* is a unique and interesting Christian interpretation. There is much more that could be said about Logos in *TriTrac*, for example how this view of Logos relates to other Christian interpretations of the role of Logos. However, this study is not devoted to the nature of the Logos in the text, but to ethics.

23 78:7, 78:34, 79:31, 82:19, 98:5, 103:16, 109:27, 109:34, 111:11.

24 Long and Sedley, *Hellenistic Philosophers*, 237–241.

25 78:4–8: ἀρκω ἵπεταρωπιε εἴ ποτα μ[η]νενταγεῖ ἀβαλ ἴμαυ [εἰ]ν οὐφαντασία· ῥωσ εννο[υ]υ εν νε. Translation by Attridge and Pagels, slightly modified.

... phantasms, shadows, and impressions, lacking reason and the light, these which belong to the vain thought, since they are not products of anything. Therefore, their end will be like their beginning: from that which did not exist (they are) to return once again to that which will not be.²⁶

Thus, the Logos is driven by impression and he produces impressions. This is repeated several times (78:4–8, 79:31, 99:5). The Logos' initial product is also defined with the term εἰδωλον, an unsubstantial form. This term, εἰδωλον, *phantasm* or *imitation*,²⁷ refers to the corporeality that the Logos instigates. The Coptic word ταντην is also used in much the same way although much more frequently.²⁸ Materiality is then explained as coming from “an imitation through an impression” (ΟΥΤΑΝΤῆ ἈΒΑΛ Ζῆ ΟΥΦΑΝΤΑCΙΑ) (98:5).²⁹ According to Diogenes Laertius, Stoics differed between two kinds of impressions: those that resulted from sensory organs, that is, the mind's being exposed through the senses to something outside it, and impressions that were caused by the mind itself.³⁰ Considering that the Logos is alone in his exile from the Pleroma—and in light of Stoic views on impressions—it would seem that *TriTrac* presents a version of the initial moments of creation as an occurrence when the Logos experiences impressions in his mind; this results in the creation of beings, *imitations*, that themselves cause more impressions. Materiality is thus caused by a figment of the Logos' mind, and that is the reason we read that matter will ultimately be destroyed in the end, because matter comes “from that which did not exist (they are) to return once again to that which will not be”.³¹

26 78:33–79:4: ΕΖῆΕΙΔΩΛΟΝ ΝΕ Μῆ ΖῆΡΔΕΙΒΕC Μῆ ΖῆΦΑΝΤΑCΙΑ ΕΥΟ ΝΧΑΕΙΕ ΜΠΛΟΓΟC Μῆ ΠΟΥΘΕΙΝ ΝΕΕΙ ΕΤΕ ΝΑ ΠΙΝΕΕΥΕ ΕΤΩΟΥΕΙΤ ΕΖῆΧΠΟ ΝΛΑΥΕ ΕΝ ΝΕ ΕΤΒΕ ΠΕΕΙ ΔΝ ΑΡΕΤΟΥΖΔΗ ΝΑΩΩΠΕ ΝΘΕ ῆΤΟΥΖΑΡΧΗ ΑΒΑΛ Ζῆ ΠΕΤΕΝΕΥ[Ω]ΟΟΠ ΕΝ ΑΤΡΟΥΤCΤΑΥ ΔΝ ΑΠΕ[Τ]ῆΝΑΩΩΠΕ ΕΝ. Translation by Attridge and Pagels, slightly modified. In this translation, and throughout the following, I diverge from Attridge and Pagels' translation of ΕΖῆΕΙΔΩΛΟΝ ΝΕ Μῆ ΖῆΡΔΕΙΒΕC Μῆ ΖῆΦΑΝΤΑCΙΑ, in order to present a systematized version of these different reflections of the Pleroma that Logos' fall gives rise to.

27 I use these two translations of the term εἰδωλον and the Coptic equivalent ταντην, in order to highlight the difference in context; because even though matter, which is defined as ταντην and εἰδωλον is an illusion and negative, *TriTrac* makes clear that matter is still useful for the system as a whole. This will be argued continually in the following.

28 εἰδωλον only occurs four times: 77:17, 78:33, 79:10, 79:11. ταντην is used more frequently and most often with the same connotations: 53:28, 74:5, 77:17, 78:32, 79:9–34, 81:4, 82:17–20, 83:8, 84:33–34, 89:21, 91:26, 93:19, 98:5–23, 99:5, 104:20, 106:5, 107:21, 109:32–36, 111:12.

29 My translation.

30 SVF 1.52, 55, 6.

31 79:2–4: ΠΕΤΕΝΕΥ[Ω]ΟΟΠ ΕΝ ΑΤΡΟΥΤCΤΑΥ ΔΝ ΑΠΕ[Τ]ῆΝΑΩΩΠΕ ΕΝ.

After the Logos' initial creation, the psychic substance and powers are produced. These in turn are associated with the term: εἶνε, *likeness*. A war breaks out between the two initial creations, between the material powers and the psychic powers; we read that the *imitations* (εἰδωλον/ταντην) wage war on the *likenesses* (εἶνε) (84:33–35). The Logos is pictured as becoming entangled with the first part of his creation. Because of this, the Son appears and the Logos manages to become disentangled from his initial erroneous creation. This leads to the creation of higher beings:

He brought forth living images of the living persons. Being handsome and good, since they are of those who exist, they resemble these in beauty, though they are not truly equal with them.³²

Here the pneumatics are created. These in turn are also associated with a kind of reflection. The term used for the pneumatics is ζικων, *image* (εἰκῶν). This discussion is surely intimately connected to the exegesis of Gen 1:26, which states that humans are molded in the image of God.³³ In the sequence of *TriTrac* quoted here, the Aeons in the Pleroma become represented in the world, not as false caricatures, but in the best possible way considering the limitations of corporeality (93:20–29, 94:10–20). Thus, we encounter the term ζικων as something that in the Logos' creation mirrors the higher world.³⁴ Plato seems to be a great inspiration here, since the text appears to echo Plato's use of the concept εἰκῶν, as the representation in the cosmos of the form of

32 90:31–36: αϰχπo ν̄ρ̄ν̄ζικων̄ εϱουαν̄ε̄ ν̄δε̄ νιρō εταν̄ε̄ ερ̄ν̄πετανιτ̄ νε̄ ν̄δε̄ πετ̄νανοϱϱ εϱωοοπ̄ ν̄τε̄ νετ̄ωοοπ̄ εϱε̄ινε̄ μεν̄ αρ̄αϱϱϱ ν̄σαε̄ιε̄ εϱωηϱ̄ ν̄δε̄ αρ̄αϱϱ ε̄ν̄ μᾱμη̄ε̄. Translation by Attridge and Pagels, slightly modified. I choose to translate νιρō as “persons”, somewhat like the way the Greek π̄ρ̄ōσωπoν̄ also could be used. See LXX 3 Kings 2:20 or Proverbs 18:5. This is also the way π̄ρ̄ōσωπoν̄ was used in the Trinitarian debates of the fourth century and onward.

33 Gen 1:26 came to be of great inspiration for Christians and Jews, many of whom formulated their anthropology in light of it. Philo, for example, spent a great deal of thought on the nature of the relation between the image of God and human nature. See Philo, *On the Creation of the World; Questions and Answers on Genesis*. The apostle Paul's reading of Gen 1:26 would inspire his anthropology and was of greatly influenced to later Christians (see Geurt Hendrik van Kooten, *Paul's Anthropology in Context: The Image of God, Assimilation to God, and Tripartite Man in Ancient Judaism, Ancient Philosophy and Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008). The question regarding the relation between the cosmos and the image of God would lead to many debates, culminating in the Origenist controversy in the fifth century, see Clark, *Origenist Controversy*, 43–84.

34 For ζικων̄ see: 90:31, 92:3, 93:25, 94:11–33, 96:24–34, 97:20, 98:23–24, 101:9, 102:12, 104:19, 116:28–34, 122:26, 123:15, 124:29.

the world and higher reality.³⁵ For example, Plato imagined time as the εἰκῶν of eternity.³⁶

In *TriTrac* we have three kinds of creation: pneumatic, psychic, and material, all relating to different kinds of reflections: *imitations*, *likenesses*, and *images*. These three reflections, I argue, represent different levels of understanding. The three different levels, as we will see further on, are connected to the three different kinds of humans. The term ζικων, *image*, is used for the pneumatic substance and powers; εἰνε, *likeness*, is used for the psychics; ταντην and εἰδωλον, *phantasm* or *imitation*, are used for matter (84:23–35, 104:18–20). While εἰδωλον, ταντην and φαντασια obfuscate, ζικων and εἰνε are used as representations of the heavenly existence resembling truth. The *image* (ζικων) is closely associated with the Aeons, because the Logos created them as the Savior gave him rest and knowledge of the world above. But the *likeness* (εἰνε) also has some truth to it, because it is derived from a part of the Logos that “remembers” (ρημεγε) the life in the Pleroma, before becoming entangled with matter (81:10–14). We thus have a hierarchy of the way the highest world is represented and it is closely associated with the different stages of corporeality imagined in *TriTrac*. Basically, the closer to matter the further away from truth. There are three kinds of appearances: one that derives from the false and illusory matter, which does not have any truth to it. The pneumatic seed has a natural attraction to the Savior and the knowledge he brings, and thus reflects it. The psychics, however, also have access to truth but it does not come immediately. At one point this is expressed through a common Platonic imagery: remembrance.

3 Remembering (and) the Nature of Virtue

The process of remembrance (ἀνάμνησις) as a way to gain knowledge was something Plato developed in his dialogues *Meno* and *Phaedo*. Neoplatonists carried on this tradition of portraying the devolution of soul into matter as slowly sinking into amnesia. Through contemplation and reasoning, one could jolt the memory and discern the differences between appearance and form. However, according to Plato, a mind too deeply rooted within the bodily sensations could not retain images of the forms in their mind.³⁷ In *TriTrac*, we

35 Plato, *The Republic* x.614–621; *Timaeus* 30.

36 Plato, *Timaeus* 37d.

37 See Plato, *Phaedo* 66b–d. For a discussion on the way Plato viewed the workings of the mind, see David J. Yount, *Plato and Plotinus on Mysticism, Epistemology, and Ethics* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

read that the Logos prays and then “remembers” the life in the Pleroma and all his brothers there. Then we read that the Logos turns to the psychic substance/powers and “he sowed in them a thought about him and an idea, so that they should remember that something greater than themselves exists prior to them, although they did not understand what it was”.³⁸ There is an association between ontology, remembrance, and ethics. Remembering where he comes from allows the Logos to become disentangled from matter. This remembrance is sown into part of creation and seems to be a way for some to gain knowledge of God (84:24–28, 97:27–36). How are these concepts to be understood further from the perspective of ethics?

The best way to live in the world, according to many ancient philosophical schools of thought, was to adopt the right attitudes to past, present, and future events. Epicurus stated that fear of death was unfounded, because where death existed, you did not, and where you existed, death did not.³⁹ But there was an imbalance here. Stoics viewed the anticipation of future events as those which were most likely to cause passions. It was more common to fear what could come to pass rather than what had already occurred. One technique to circumvent the effect of anticipated negative future events was to remind oneself of the error of one’s fears and not to concentrate on events that were outside one’s control. Epictetus is said to have recommended that people continuously remind themselves of the mortality of their family members in order not to cultivate negative anticipation and develop attachments that eventually would be broken.⁴⁰

Another mnemonic technique used to further ethical behavior involved reminding oneself of past good events. Seneca wrote that one should remember the good things of one’s past but that this good past was only available for those who *were* good.⁴¹ Seneca remembers what the “genuine and old-fashioned”

38 83:22–26: ἀφσίτε νῆντοῦ νῆνοῦμεγε [ἀρ]ὰ αὐτὸ οὐμὰκκῆξ ἀτροῦ[ρῆμ]εγε· ἄε οὐνῆ νοσ ἀραῦ ψῶ[οπ] ῆα τοῦεζήν· ἐμποῦῆνε [ἄε] εὔ πετενεφῶοοπ. Here I emend the word ἀτροῦ[...]εγε to ἀτροῦ[ρῆμ]εγε, which differs from the renditions of Thomassen, as well as Attridge and Pagels, because in this context, just before this sentence, the Logos has “remembered” (ρῆμεγε) the Aeons of the Pleroma and it is this that results with the creation of the psychics. It is only natural that the sentence would continue with this theme. Furthermore, the lacuna, in my opinion appears to be longer than one letter.

39 Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus*. Lucretius tried to argue that it is just as illogical to fear one’s future non-existence as fearing the fact that there was once a time in the past when one did not exist. For more on this discussion see Richard Sorabji, *Emotions and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 228–232.

40 Epictetus, *Discourses* III.28.84–88.

41 Seneca, *On the Shortness of Life* 10.

philosopher Fabianus once said: “we must fight against the passions with main force ... for the passions must be, not nipped, but crushed”.⁴² One important aspect of fighting passions was having a proper handle on time, according to Seneca. A mind that was untroubled and tranquil was free to roam all the parts of one’s life and enjoy past good experiences, while a troubled mind focused only on the present and would always find life too short and time wasted. Plutarch agreed and wrote that the wise person uses past good memories for their own benefit instead of just focusing on the future. The wise person mixes the good parts of one’s past with the good in the present, while suppressing the bad things in the past, thus retaining a harmonious life.⁴³ Seneca writes that even the people who have come furthest in their philosophical studies and know the difference between good and evil still need to be reminded of their knowledge, because one’s knowledge “should not be in storage, but ready for use”.⁴⁴ Actively engaging the memory by remembrance was a viable technique for ethical progress.⁴⁵ Epictetus is even said to have maintained that one could cure present evils by remembering the past, by shifting focus in distressing moments that could influence and cause disturbances in the mind.⁴⁶ Plato, like Epictetus, valued firm hope of relief from present evils, and the remembrance of past goods was a key for building that hope.⁴⁷ Some Christians would take this in a somewhat different direction, valuing hope for the future (most often a better and eternal life) that was not based on memory but on a promise. Christian hope, or faith, based on God’s word, could give comfort in the present, as Paul claimed (1 Thess 4:13–15).⁴⁸

It is this context, I believe, we should understand *TriTrac*’s frequent call to the psychics and the Logos to *remember*, which draws on the thought that

42 Seneca, *On the Shortness of Life* 10. Translation by John W. Basore, *Seneca: Moral Essays*, vol. 2 (Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1932), 317.

43 Plutarch, *On Tranquility of Mind* 473b–474b.

44 Seneca, *Epistles* 94.26. Translation by Richard M. Gummere, *Seneca: Epistles*, vol. 3 (Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1925), 29.

45 Blossom Stefaniw, “A Disciplined Mind in an Orderly World Mimesis in Late Antique Ethical Regimes”, in *Metaphor—Narratio—Mimesis—Doxologie*, eds. Ulrich Volp et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 236–255.

46 Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* x.22; Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* III.33, III.76, v.74.

47 Plato, *Philebus* 32c, 35e–36b, 40a–e, 50b.

48 “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died”. All translations of the New Testament come from NRSV if nothing else is indicated.

the soul was connected to an eternal life before becoming mixed with matter (84:24–28, 97:27–36). The reemergence is, however, not enough, but is combined with the admonition to trust God, and to have “a firm hope” (ΟΥΖΕΛΠΙΟϛ ΕΣΤΑΔΡΑΕΙΤϛ) (128:10–11) that God will deliver them to a union with him and the Pleroma.

In *TriTrac* humankind is made up of all three substances: matter, psychê, and pneuma. We read that “the first human is a mixed formation, and a mixed creation, and a deposit of those of the left and those of the right, and a pneumatic rationality”.⁴⁹ These correspond to, as will be elaborated upon in the next chapter, the three basic substances of the human constitution: a material body, an emotive soul, and a reasoning intellect. However, the representation that made its imprint on the mind, and the kinds of ‘knowledge’ on which one based one’s descriptions, depended on the formation of the mind and the substance which was strongest within each individual. Minds that were too immersed in matter were completely lost, just as Plato maintained that a mind that was too deeply rooted within bodily sensations could not remember images of true forms.⁵⁰ People associated with the psychic substance are called to remember (84:24–28, 97:27–36) and thus have the ability to know truth, although not completely it would seem. The psychics can recognize the Savior when he appears, but this does not happen immediately; it is clear that they need to be convinced and taught what to do (118:28–119:15). It is the pneumatic substance that is most clearly associated with knowledge and understanding in *TriTrac*, but rather than remembering, the pneumatic people *react instinctively* to the appearance of knowledge/the Savior. We read that the pneumatic person “gains knowledge immediately” (ΑΦΧΙ ΜΠΟΑΥΝΕϛ ΖΝ ΟΥΘΕΠΗ) (118:35–36), while the psychics are, rather, involved in a process of instruction and remembering (118:28–119:15).

The epistemology of the strict materialists is thoroughly rejected in *TriTrac*, even turned on its head, since matter is treated as an illusion. Matter will be annihilated in the end times (79:1–5). The Platonic view of the relation between the cosmos and the world of forms—that matter was the receptacle for the idea—is radicalized in *TriTrac*. In *TriTrac* the illusions of materiality are juxtaposed with the remembrance and knowledge of the Pleroma above, both granted by the Savior (88:19–25). We read that to reach salvation humans need

49 106:18–22: ΔΕ ΠΩΔΡΠ ΔΕ ΝΡΩΜΕϛ ΟΥΠΛΑΣΜΑ ΠΕ ΕΦΤΗΖ ΠΕϛ ΑΥΩ ΟΥΤΣΕϛ ΝΟ ΠΕ ΕΦΤΗΖ ΠΕϛ ΑΥΩ ΟΥΚΟΥ ΑΡΡΗΙ ΠΕϛ ΝΔΕ ΝΙΣΒΟΥΡ ΠΕ ΜΝ ΝΙΟΥΝΕΗ ΠΕϛ ΑΥΩ ΟΥΠΗ(ΕΥΗ)ΑΤΙΚΟϛ ΝΛΟΓΟϛ.

50 See Plato, *Phaedo* 66b–d; *Meno* 82a–86b. For more on this topic, see David J. Yount, *Plato and Plotinus on Mysticism, Epistemology, and Ethics* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

to be provided with likeness. Twice, the acquisition of knowledge is likened to viewing a reflection through a mirror (οὐραειλ):

The entire preparation of the adornment of the images and likenesses and imitations have come into being because of those who need education and teaching and formation, so that the smallness might grow, little by little, as through a mirror image.⁵¹

(Christ's) members, however, needed a school in the places which are adorned, so that they might receive from them the images of the form of the archetypical pattern, like a mirror.⁵²

These passages make clear that the world—made up of “images and likenesses and imitations” (νικῶνων μη νικεινε μη νικαντων)—works like a mirror for higher truths.⁵³ Thus, matter, or rather corporeal existence, seems to be treated in a dual way in *TriTrac*. The world is a reflection of the divine, but only some aspects in the world. *TriTrac* downgraded materiality and attaches it to the lowest level of understanding (illusion, phantasms). Salvation and understanding are not reached through matter, through false “impressions” that were subjected to the mind, but through the “images” and “likenesses” associated with the pneumatic or psychic substance, because it was in these two substances that the higher world was mirrored. This becomes clear in the passage expanding on the creation of the pneumatics. The pneumatics are described as:

... living images of the living persons, pleasing among [things] which are good, existing among the things which exist, resembling them in beauty, but unequal to them in truth.⁵⁴

51 104:18–25: πικαβτε τηρῶ ἴπιτκαειω ἵτε νικῶνων μη νικεινε μη νικαντων· ερεῖνταγωπε· ετβε νετῆ χρια· ἴνογσανεω· ἴνῶ ογσβω μη ἴμορφη δεκασε ερεῖνῆτωμη· ναχι ἴνογπαγρει· κατα ωμη ωμη· ζωσ ζῖτῆ πεινε· ἴνογσειλ. Translation by Attridge and Pagels, slightly modified.

52 123:11–16: νεφμελος δε· αγῆ χρια ἴνογμα ἴχι σβω πεει ετωοοπ ζρηῖ ζῆ ἴτοπος· ετ·τῆ[ε]ναειτ· ατρεφχι εινε· αβαλ ζῖτοστογ αννικῶν ανιγυπος ἴωαρῆ ἴπικατ· ἴνογσειλ. Translation by Attridge and Pagels, slightly modified.

53 As Thomassen has suggested, the metaphor of the mirror likely draws on 1 Cor 13:12. The above discussion on images, likenesses, and imitations highlights just how important it was. Clement elaborates on the same metaphors.

54 90:31–36: αφχπο ἴνῆζῖκων εγoyανῆ· ἴδε ἴρο· ετανῆ· ερῆπεταινιτ· νε ἴδε πετῆανογoy εγωοοπ ἴτε νετῆοοπ εγεινε· μεν αραγoy ἴκαειε εγωωμ ἴδε αραoy εν μαμνε. Translation by Attridge and Pagels, slightly modified.

Here ontology, epistemology, and ethics merge. It is only part of the substance that exists in the world, the pneumatic substance, that is able to reflect the highest truths and goodness in the world (however, never matching it). The psychics, too, have truth and goodness within them, but only in relation to the ignorance and morality of matter. We read that these psychic “powers were good and were greater than those of the imitation” (Π[Ι]ΤΑΝΤῆ).⁵⁵

The good in *TriTrac* is firmly attached to the highest divine principle. One term that appears is ἀρετή, which was used throughout the ancient world as a term referring to ‘excellence of character’, including moral excellence in the sense of ‘virtue’. It is a very unusual term in the Nag Hammadi texts, only appearing 18 times, ten of which are in *TriTrac*.⁵⁶ This term is almost solely reserved for the highest world in *TriTrac*, chiefly as a quality God possesses (53:10, 59:3, 73:17). The Son is described as “being each one of the virtues (of the Father) (εἴροει [Ν]ΤΟΥΕΙΕ ΤΟΥΕΙΕ ἸΝΙΑΡΕΤΗ) (67:13–14). The Aeons, being the collective that makes up the heavenly Church, are also identified as the “virtues” of the Father (69:40, 73:10).⁵⁷ It would seem that the best one could do to reach the good *in the world*, was to reflect the divine world to the best of one’s ability. Knowledge of God was not reached through materiality, but through images and representations of the higher truths mirrored in psychic substance and pneumatic substance. Furthermore, as has been made clear, the pneumatic substance was associated with immediate knowledge while the psychic substance was referred to a pedagogic plan of remembrance in order to access knowledge. In this way, *TriTrac* uses epistemic language to make ethical points. This connection does not seem to have been all that uncommon among early Christians well read in ancient philosophy. Clement of Alexandria, too, linked epistemology and ethics—in similar metaphors as we find in *TriTrac*—when he wrote that it was only the true Gnostic Christian who had retained deeper

55 82:15–17: ΝΙΘΞΗ ΘΕ ΝΕΝΑΝΟΥΟΥ Π[Ε] ΔΥΩ ΝΑΥΟΥΔΕΙ ἸΡΟΥΟ ΔΝΑ Π[Ι]ΤΑΝΤῆ. Translation by Attridge and Pagels, slightly modified.

56 53:10, 59:3, 59:9, 67:14, 67:21, 67:33, 69:40, 73:10, 73:17, 100:27.

57 Interestingly enough, the only time the term does not refer to the highest divine principle, it is used for the ‘excellence’ of the chief Archon, the Demiurge, that the Logos places on top of the cosmic *oikonomia*. This is a clear indication, in my mind, of the legitimation *TriTrac* places in the structures that guide the cosmic order. We also encounter the term ἀγαθός and the Coptic equivalent ΝΑΝΟΥ, also applied to the Father (61:29, 138:19), but much more often to aspects outside of the Pleroma, chiefly the right side of the Logos creation and the psychics, those who are *likenesses* of the world above. For references to where the words appear, see Attridge and Pagels, “The Tripartite Tractate”, in *Notes*, 353–354, 387.

knowledge of God through contemplation. It was the Gnostic who could look in the mirror of the world and see God.⁵⁸

So, in what way is the Pleroma reflected in the world and how do humans relate to the structure of the ideal life in the heavens?

4 The Individual and the Collective

In the beginning the Pleroma is in harmony. What disrupts the initial harmony in the Pleroma and introduces ignorance is the fall of the Logos, the exile of the youngest Aeons from his fellows. The Logos becomes isolated from his collective and instead becomes mixed up with the material part of his creation, what is called “imitation” (ΕΙΔΩΛΟΝ/ΤΑΝΤῼ). The Son appears to the Logos, in order for the Logos to escape being mixed with the material powers and instead become one with the Son and reintegrated into the heavenly world. This concept—becoming one with a greater power, with a collective—is how *TriTrac* describes the ideal and harmonious state of being. The reason for the Logos’ erroneous and deficient creation is his isolation from the collective. The importance of the relation between the individual and the collective, I will argue, is crucial for the basic epistemology in *TriTrac* and fundamental for the ethics of the text.

We find this theme throughout the text: the ideal state of an individual is to be totally and harmoniously integrated within a greater collective, although retaining individuality. The concept of the godhead is three individuals simultaneously existing as a total unity while retaining their individuality. We read that God consists of Father, Son, and Church, sharing the same substance (ΟΥCΙΑ), dispositions (ΔΙΔΘΕCΙC), and virtues (ΑΡΕΤΗ) (58:14, 59:3–10). The same is true of the next level: the Pleroma/the All. The nature of the true Aeons above the caricatures of the Logos’ creation is described as living in unity, but each Aeon is simultaneously its own. The Pleroma is “a single image although many” (ΕΦΘΕΙ ΝΟΥCΙΝΕ ΝΟΥΩΤ· ΕΞΔΞ ΠΕ·) (68:31–32). The Father brought forth the Aeons “in order that it might be discovered that they exist according to their individual virtues in a unified way”.⁵⁹ Furthermore, the Son is called by numerous names, 19 of them are given on page 66, all of which exist in

58 Clement, *Stromata* IV.3.12.2, VII.10.57.1, VII.3.13.1, V.1.7.5, V.6.40. For more on Clement use of epistemology, see Raoul Mortley, “The Mirror and I Cor. 13.12 in the Epistemology of Clement of Alexandria,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 30 (1976): 109–120.

59 67:31–34: ΔΕΚΑC Ξῆ ΟΥΗῆΤΟΥCΙ ΝΟΥΩΤ· ΕΥΘΑΝΤῆC ΕΥΨΟΟΠ ΚΑΤΑ ΤΟΥCΙΕ· ΤΟΥCΙΕ ΝΑΡΕΤΗ. Translation by Attridge and Pagels, slightly modified.

his single Name, by “which he is not called” (σεμοϋτε ἀραϋ ἴμαϋ εν·) (66:33–34).⁶⁰ In the middle of the first part of the tractate the unity of the Pleroma and the individual Aeon is expounded upon in a beautiful analogy to time:

Just as the present age, though a unity, is divided by units of time and units of time are divided into years and years are divided into seasons and seasons into months, and months into days, and days into hours, and hours into moments, so too the aeon of the Truth (the Pleroma) is single yet many.⁶¹

The passage continues the analogy: each individual is a part of a whole just like different aspects of a tree forms a single tree, or as different body parts together make a whole body. Salvation is in this way likened to the restoration of the individual to the collective. To reach knowledge in *TriTrac* one has to become mingled with the Son (123:11–32).⁶² The Son is made up of the collective that is identified as the Church (57:8–59:1, 122:12–125:11).⁶³ The term *apokatastasis*, which Origen also utilized, is then used for the end-time salvation (123:11–27, 133:6–7).

This ideal state, that of an individual retaining its originality while simultaneously being totally integrated within something else, reminds us of Stoic epistemology.⁶⁴ To understand the relation between different substances in

60 The different names do not grasp any aspect of the Father but their function seems to be to enable the Aeons to sing the Father's praise (54:5–15, 65:35–66:5).

61 73:28–74:3: δε πρητε ἱππιδων τενοϋ εοϋει πε ἴουωτ· εφηνω ρῆ ἴουοειω αϋω {αρ}ενοϋαιω πηω· ρρενραμπε· ενραμπε· πηω· ρρῆνωϋ· ἴνωϋ δε ρρενεβετε· νεβετε· δε ρρενρσοϋ· ἴρσοϋ ρρενωϋναϋε· αϋω νοϋναϋε ρρῆνωϋσοϋ πεει πε πρητε ρωωϋ αν ἱππιδων ἴτε τῆνε· εοϋει πε ἴουωτ εναιωωϋ. Translation by Attridge and Pagels, slightly modified.

62 Just as for Clement, *TriTrac* here makes it clear that the knowledge of the Father is reached through the Son. See Clement, *Stromata* vi.12.102.2.

63 There is a debate whether only the “elect” make up the body of the Savior, or whether psychics were also members of the church. This will be discussed in the second part of the study. Here it suffices to recognize that the psychics are also granted partial knowledge and salvation, and that these psychics are at least closely affiliated with the church, and in this sense, can be counted as among the collective.

64 This is pointed out in Dunderberg, *Gnostic Morality*, 132–133. Here Dunderberg expands on his previous article “Stoic Traditions in the School of Valentinus”, in *Stoicism in Early Christianity*, eds. Tuomas Rasmus et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2010), 220–238. There are several features of *TriTrac* that I here elaborate on, in light of Dunderberg's findings. The first concerns the description of the highest realm, the Pleroma, which also follows notion of blending, although more explicitly, and the second

the world and the nature of the way they come together, Stoics like Chrysippus employed theories of blending. He maintained that it was possible for a substance to share one and the same space with another substance, that two or more substances could be completely intertwined without being dissolved into one another.⁶⁵ This was called *blending* (κράσις). Blending was different from the theory of “fusion” (σύγχυσις) where substances lost their individual integrity, and different from “juxtaposition” (παράθεσις) where substances never really partook of one another. Blending theory was crucial for Stoic physics as well as ethics.⁶⁶ Stoics maintained that divine reason (Logos) permeated all existence and for this to work it required the theory of blending. A virtuous person was someone who had become totally blended with the Logos.

The theory of blending was also important for Stoic epistemology. As discussed above, Stoics thought that human cognition was a result of the tensional field of one’s mind being joined with the tensional field of the outside.⁶⁷ The structure of one’s mind in part shaped the kind of impressions to which one was subjected, or rather created for oneself. An untrained mind was a tensional field in disarray, and such a mind was prone to experiencing and acting on false impressions (φαντασία). A stable and firm tensional field of the mind, which was *blended* in harmony with the divine reason that permeated all existence, did not experience or act on false impressions.⁶⁸ This state, being harmoniously blended with the Logos, was called *συμπάθεια* and was the only way one could obtain true knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and, by extension, experience *good* emotions.⁶⁹ To live a virtuous life, according to Stoics, entailed living as a part of a whole, of Nature, as a separate individual although totally and harmoniously integrated into Nature. This was the principle of *συμπάθεια*, based on the notion of blending (κράσις).⁷⁰ As Ismo Dunderberg has noted,

concerns the difference made between different kinds of blending, between a positive *blending* and a negative *mixing*. This will be discussed below.

65 For the ancient sources on Chrysippus’ views on blending (κράσις) we have Alexander of Aphrodisias’ discussion and elaboration on it in his text *De mixtione* 216.14–218.6.

66 For the importance of the notion of *blending* for Stoic physics, epistemology and ethics, see Buch-Hansen, *It is the Spirit*, 75–84.

67 Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 11.84.

68 Some Stoics qualified this by introducing proto-passions, preliminary motions of the mind which all humans, even the sage, experienced. These were not full-blown passions but merely “first movements” (*primus motus*). Seneca, *On Anger* 11.2.2, 11.2.1, 11.4.2.

69 For a summary of Stoic epistemology from the perspective of κράσις see Buch-Hansen, *It is the Spirit*, 79–84.

70 Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De mixtione* 1; Cicero, *On Ends* 11.73f.

some Valentinians seem to have been inspired by these ideas.⁷¹ I would argue that *TriTrac*'s employment of these concepts is much more extensive than has previously been noticed and, what is more important for our concerns, the concepts are fundamental for grasping the basis for the ethical foundations of *TriTrac*. Let us now see how *TriTrac*'s epistemology relates to the Stoic concepts of blending (κρᾶσις and συμπάθεια).

5 Mixing and Blending, Truth and Falsehood

The description of the Aeons' individuality and unity within the Pleroma, as well as the Godhead's three separate yet indistinguishable parts, seems to rely on a similar theory of blending as the Stoic idea of κρᾶσις. Existing in harmonious accordance with a whole, playing one's particular part, whether big or small, is in *TriTrac* described as being *merged* or *joined* (ΜΟΥΧΘ or ΤΩΤ). However, *TriTrac* also makes use of a negative state of blending. We find an important distinction made between different states of blending: between ΜΟΥΧΘ⁷²/ΤΩΤ⁷³ on the one hand, and ΤΩΞ⁷⁴/ΤΑΞΤΞ⁷⁵ on the other. The distinction between these states of blending has to my knowledge not been recognized before.⁷⁶ The words ΤΩΞ and ΤΑΞΤΞ, or their negations occur 11 times and always in a negative sense, referring to an unhealthy blending. These terms are not used in the first part of the text discussing the highest realm (except once as defining what the highest Father is *not*: 54:26). "Being

71 At least as some church fathers portrayed 'Valentinians'. See, for example, Clement's quotation of *ExcTheod* 17:1; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.6.2. See Dunderberg, *Gnostic Morality*, 131–134; Dunderberg, "Stoic Traditions", 220–238; Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 95–118.

72 One possible Greek equivalent to ΜΟΥΧΘ is συμμηνύνα. See Walter E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), 214a. For ΜΟΥΧΘ in *TriTrac*, see 65:22, 66:29, 68:26, 72:14–15, 73:11–12, 80:16, 86:35, 87:26, 90:20, 91:3, 92:17–18, 94:39, 116:4–5, 117:16, 122:23, 128:18. ΖΩΤΡΕ also appears to be used once in the sense of "being united" or "joined" (132:4–11) (Crum, *Coptic*, 726a).

73 Considering the way ΤΩΤ is used, the Greek equivalent is possibly σύγκρασις (Crum, *Coptic*, 437b). For ΤΩΤ see 68:27, 70:3, 71:11, 74:25, 75:23–24, 76:9–18, 82:1, 90:36–37, 93:3–4, 95:4–7, 99:19, 122:17–27, 123:24.

74 ΤΩΞ possibly renders Greek ταρασσεσθαι (Crum, *Coptic*, 453b). See 90:17–18, 93:18, 97:25, 106:19.

75 Sometimes spelled ΤΞΤΞ, with the connotations "mix" and "confuse" (Greek φυρμός; see Crum, *Coptic*, 462a). See *TriTrac* 54:26, 85:11, 89:34, 110:32, 110:34, 121:22, 132:10.

76 The translation by Attridge and Pagels does not seem to differ between the different connotations of the terms but translates them somewhat interchangeably, a practice followed by, as far as I can see, Thomassen, *Le traité tripartite*; as well as Nagel, *Der Tractatus Tripartitus*.

mixed”, as I will henceforth translate $\tau\omega\lambda$ and $\tau\alpha\lambda\tau\lambda$, designating the unbeneficial form of blending, is contrasted with the terms $\mu\omicron\gamma\chi\sigma$ and $\tau\omega\tau$, which occur over 30 times in the text, and used in a positive sense and context. At times $\tau\omega\tau$ has eschatological connotations while $\mu\omicron\gamma\chi\sigma$ seems to also be used more neutrally. $\tau\omega\tau$ is used, for example, when the elect join with the Savior (122:13–17); when the Logos is reintegrated with the Pleroma from whom he had fallen away (122:25–27); as the harmonious state of the Aeons (68:27, 71:11); and as a description of the ultimate restoration ($\alpha\pi\omicron\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\sigma\tau\alpha\sigma\iota\varsigma$) of the Church and the Pleroma (123:11–27, 133:6–7).⁷⁷

The state of “mixing” ($\tau\omega\lambda/\tau\alpha\lambda\tau\lambda$) is never mentioned when the text describes the Aeons in the Pleroma. The words for mixing are used when the Logos gets “unmixed” ($\alpha\tau\tau\omega\lambda$) from his erroneous creation by virtue of the intercession of the Savior (90:17–18); when the Logos does not allow his superior powers to “mix” ($\tau\omega\lambda$) with the inferior ones (97:25); when the righteous Hebrews transcend the influence of the “mixed powers” ($\mu\iota\sigma\omicron\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon\lambda\tau\alpha\lambda\tau$) and “attained to the level of the unmixed ones” ($\alpha\gamma\tau\epsilon\lambda\omicron\ \bar{\nu}\tau\alpha\lambda\iota\varsigma\ \bar{\nu}\Delta\epsilon\ \mu\iota\alpha\tau\text{-}\alpha\lambda\tau\bar{\epsilon}$) (110:33–34);⁷⁸ and to denote those humans and angels who will be lost and destroyed in the end; they are described as mixed ($\tau\epsilon\lambda\tau\lambda/\tau\epsilon\lambda\tau\lambda$) (120:21, 121:22). This mixed state is the original human reality and would have been permanent if it were not for the grace of the Savior. The three kinds of human substances/classes we encounter—pneuma, psychê and matter—are all “mixed” ($\tau\omega\lambda/\tau\eta\lambda$) before the Savior comes, just as the cosmic powers who are at war with each other are mixed. Salvation is then described as a *joining* or *blending* ($\tau\omega\tau/\mu\omicron\gamma\chi\sigma$) with the Savior and the harmony of the Pleroma (122:15–27, 123:21–25).⁷⁹

TriTrac’s concept of positive blending, especially $\tau\omega\tau$, is very much reminiscent of the Stoic notions of $\sigma\upsilon\mu\pi\acute{\alpha}\theta\epsilon\iota\alpha$, while being mixed ($\tau\omega\lambda/\lambda\tau\lambda$), on

77 Compared to $\tau\omega\tau$, $\mu\omicron\gamma\chi\sigma$ seems to be used more neutrally.

78 My translation.

79 Dunderberg suggests that Aristotelian notions of blending might also be influential here. I agree and suggest that what we have here is a mix of Aristotelian notions of blending, and Stoic notions of blending and sympathy. According to Aristotle, the superior substance of a mixture could be affected by being mixed and become something new. In *TriTrac*, this is not irreversible, neither was it so for Aristotle. For Stoics, the unfavorable element in life was the result of being in flux, constant changing and shaking that resulted in wrong impressions seeming favorable. What was needed was for the blending to become balanced, firm, and harmonious ($\sigma\upsilon\mu\pi\acute{\alpha}\theta\epsilon\iota\alpha$); thus the mind would not be as vulnerable to impressions. I would argue that both these notions, the Aristotelian possibility of a mixed state being reversed and the Stoic goal of a blended state in sympathy, appear in *TriTrac*. See Aristotle, *On Generation and Corruption* 1.10.327b; Buch-Hansen, *It is the Spirit*, 75–84; Dunderberg, “Stoic Traditions”, 231–236.

the other hand, represents a disturbed state; a person who is intermingled with false impressions and powers is more reminiscent of what Stoics viewed as an untrained mind that did not live in accordance with the divine Logos.⁸⁰

Similarly, *TriTrac* seems to equate salvation and knowledge with a firm mind that is not subjected to false impressions, and one that is harmoniously blended with God/the Savior. This can, for instance, be seen in the way the Logos is depicted in *TriTrac*. When the Logos is in his original state, he is *joined* (ΜΟΥΧΟΣ/ΤΩΤ) with the Pleroma, and this is described as firm and unchanging, but when he falls he becomes *mixed* (ΤΩΞ) with his lower creation and this is described as unstable, disturbed, and changing. After his fall, the Logos is associated with movement; he is called “the one who moved,” “the Logos who moved” (85:15–16, 115:21, 115:28), “the movement which is the Logos” (77:7).⁸¹ In this state, he acts erroneously and on false impressions (ΦΑΝΤΑΣΙΑ) and is subjected to *phantasms* (ΕΙΔΩΛΟΝ); he is described as “double minded” (ΤΜΗΝΤ-ΖΗΤ ΖΗΕΥ) (77:21–25), and in an “unstable condition” (ΜΙΤΩΩΕ ΗΠΡΗΤΕ ΝΗΑΤΣΜΙΝΕ) (80:31–32); his creations are “not in accordance with reason” (ΚΑΤΑ ΛΟΓΟΣ ΕΝ) (81:12). After his misstep, the Logos looks down at his creation and “instead of unification, he saw division, instead of stability, he [saw] disturbances, instead of [rest], disarray”.⁸² However, the other Aeons take pity on the Logos in his distress and send down the Savior to him. He is “returned to his stability” (ΕΝΤΑΥΣΤΑΥ ΔΕΘΥΝ ΑΠΕΦΟΜΗ) (92:23–24) when he becomes “unmixed” (ΑΤΤΩΞ) from his creation (90:17–18).

The Savior is then sent down to humans as well, from “the unchanging thought of the Logos who returned to himself, after his movement”.⁸³ This results in truth and knowledge. When the Logos is taken from his mixed and unstable state and returned to his original harmonious merged and stable state; he is described as acting through “wisdom and knowledge” (ΟΥΣΟΦΙΑ ΖΗΝ ΟΥΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΗ) (91:2–3). Thus, the opposite of acting from a mixed and unstable state is to act in accordance with the harmonious blended state of the Father’s Pleroma, a state called “restful” (ΑΝΑΠΑΥΣΙΣ/ΗΤΟΝ) on several occasions (70:18, 90:19, 92:9, 107:26). The final restoration and the baptism also draw on this particular language. The restoration is complete when all members are back in one place, when they are *merged* (ΤΩΤ) (123:24). Baptism is when

80 For example, 70:3 where ΤΩΤ is used for the unity of the Aeons, defined as the thought of God.

81 These passages and the theme of movement will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

82 80:16–19: ΑΝΤΙ ΟΥΜΟΥΧΟΣ ΑΦΗΕΥ Α[ΥΟΥ]ΩΩΕ ΑΝΤΙ ΟΥΣΜΙΝΕ ΔΥ[ΝΕΥ] ΔΕΞΩΤΟΡΤΡ ΔΑΝΤΙ ΖΕΝΗ[ΤΑΝ] ΔΕΝΤΑΡΑΧΗ. Translation by Attridge and Pagels, slightly modified.

83 115:26–28: ΠΙΝΕΥΕ ΗΝΑΤΠΩΩΝΕ ΑΒΑΛ ΗΤΕ ΠΛΟΓΟΣ ΕΝΤΑΥΣΤΑΥ ΕΘΟΥΝ ΗΜΙΝ ΗΜΟΦ ΗΝΝΣΑ ΠΕΦΚΙΜ.

the Father grants humans “their merging with him in knowledge” (ΝΟΥΜΟΥΣΟ ΝΗΜΕΥ ΖΗΝ ΟΥΣΑΥΝΕ) (128:18–19),⁸⁴ which will happen in “an unwavering and immovable way” (ΟΥΜΗΤΑ<Τ>ΡΙΚΕ· ΜΗ ΟΥΜΗΤΑΤΚΙΜ) (128:27–28), and this is how the “redemption into God, Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit”⁸⁵ is described.

As Dunderberg has suggested, it seems possible that *TriTrac* here draws upon the Stoic doctrine of being harmoniously merged with the divine, resulting in knowledge. However, it is still important to recognize—as Dunderberg does—that there are aspects in *TriTrac* that are completely un-Stoic: for example, the attitude toward matter. To this I would add that the way the concept of “mixing” is presented is also fundamentally un-Stoic. In *TriTrac*, the mixed state is due to the influence of matter, which brings about *phantasms* and *imitations*, illusions that draw the mind away from knowledge and harmony and into strife and unrest. Stoics were, as we know, materialists and did not view matter as inherently negative; one could not be “unmixed” from matter since everything was matter. We find, however, in the epistemology of Plato and Aristotle something that is very much reminiscent of the way “mixing” is used in *TriTrac*. As seen above, Plato and Aristotle differentiated between beliefs and knowledge. Belief pertained to the sensible world, to sense perception and was the result of the mind being “mixed” with the body. Knowledge could only be retained in the mind and for this the mind needed to be unmixed from the body. Sense perception was connected to the body, like the eyes and other organs, and it was through the bodily senses that one formed beliefs about the world. But knowledge was something different, it did not depend on organs or anything bodily. The mind itself produced knowledge and if the mind was to retain an uninfluenced perspective it needed to be unmixed from the body. For this, Aristotle uses the term ἀμιγῆ, *unmixed*. In his work *On the Soul*, Aristotle writes that:

It is necessary then that mind, since it thinks all things, should be unmixed (ἀμιγῆ), as Anaxagoras says, in order that it may be in control, that is, that it may know; for the intrusion of anything foreign hinders and obstructs it ... So it is unreasonable to suppose that it [the mind] is mixed (μεμίχθαι) with the body; for in that case it would become somehow qualitative, *e.g.*, hot or cold, or would even have some organ, as the sensitive faculties have; but in fact, it has none.⁸⁶

84 Translation by Attridge and Pagels, slightly modified.

85 127:30–32: ΠΩΤΕ· ΑΖΟΥΝ ΕΠΝΟΥΓΕ· ΠΩΤ· ΜΗ ΠΩΗΡΕ ΜΗ ΠΗ(ΕΥΗ)Δ ΕΤΟΥΔΑΒ.

86 Aristotle, *On the Soul* III.4.429a19–23: ἀνάγκη ἄρα, ἐπεὶ πάντα νοεῖ, ἀμιγῆ εἶναι, ὥσπερ φησὶν Ἀναξαγόρας, ἵνα κρατῆ, τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶν ἵνα γνωρίζῃ· παρεμφαινόμενον γὰρ κωλύει τὸ ἀλλότριον

The mind does not have the same attributes as the body, and a clear mind should not be distracted by bodily functions. Knowledge is reached, not through bodily senses but through pure intellectual ability.⁸⁷ Plato argued something very similar.⁸⁸ First-century CE Middle Platonists such as Philo and Plutarch used the term ἀμιγῆ in the same way as Aristotle in the above quote.⁸⁹ This is also, I argue, the basis for the distinction made in *TriTrac* between those who have the ability to gain knowledge and those who do not. Those powers that are thoroughly material, by definition, do not have what it takes to retain knowledge. To be able to retain knowledge one needs the mind and, what is more pertinent, one needs the absence of bodily influence. As has become clear from the discussion above, the negative mixture is always associated with the left side of the Logos' creation, that which is associated with materiality, false impressions, and the body. Thus, one could say that the concept of *mixing* in *TriTrac* draws on the Platonic and Aristotelian thought that the mind needs to be detached from the influence of base matter, because, as Plato and Aristotle pointed out, an unfavorable mixing between mind and body could not lead to knowledge.⁹⁰ The mind needed to be “unmixed”, that is, uncorrupted by outside influence, in order for true knowledge to be viable.

6 Conclusion: Ontology, Epistemology, and Ethics

It is perhaps fitting to begin the conclusion of the present chapter with an elucidation of the appropriation of philosophy among ancient Christians. Just because we find Stoic thought in a Christian text (or for that matter Platonic or Aristotelian thought), it does not necessarily mean that the people behind the texts got that specific thought from Stoics, or recognized it as Stoic. Even

καὶ ἀντιφράττει... διὸ οὐδὲ μὲμιχθαι εὐλογον αὐτὸν τῷ σώματι· ποιός τις γὰρ ἂν γίγνοιτο, ψυχρὸς ἢ θερμὸς, ἢ καὶ ὄργανόν τι εἶη, ὥσπερ τῷ αἰσθητικῷ· νῦν δ' οὐθὲν ἔστιν. Translation by Hett, the only difference is that I translate ἀμιγῆ “unmixed” instead of “uncontaminated” in order to make the connection to *TriTrac* clearer. See W. S. Hett, *Aristotle: On the Soul*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1957), 165.

87 Aristotle, *On the Soul* III.4.429.

88 Plato, *Phaedo* 66b–67b.

89 Plutarch, *On the Sign of Socrates* 591d–e; Philo, *On Abraham* 124–130. Discussed further in Chapter 4.

90 See also the ethical pursuits favored by Plotinus, who strived for *catharsis*: cutting away the passions and the negative influence of matter and being reintegrated into the divine Intellect. See John Dillon, “An Ethics for the Late Antique Sage”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 320–322.

less likely is it that they—or more specifically whoever was behind *TriTrac*—would have acknowledged that Christianity in any way depended on Stoicism, or any other philosophical school for that matter. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 4–5: Christian theologians of the first few centuries, in general terms, saw their teachings as the *culmination* of philosophy, the perfecting of it, not as founded on philosophy. As George Boys-Stones has pointed out: ancient philosophers did not shy away from borrowing ideas from their ‘opponents’ and making them their own, and this applied to Christian thinkers as well.⁹¹

In order to understand the fundamental principles of any ethical discussion, ontology and epistemology are crucial. As is so clear in *TriTrac*, the different substances of which the world and humans are made up relate in different ways to knowledge and salvation. As has been explored in detail in this chapter, knowledge is equal to goodness as well as salvation. In *TriTrac*, the world is composed of three different kinds of substance, all of which reflect the divine in different ways. The psychic substance has potential and retains the possibility for gaining truth, being a *likeness* (εἶκῆ) of the things above, but for this it needs remembrance, a concept reminiscent of how ancient philosophers imagined basic moral development to take place. The pneumatic substance is stronger in its reflection of and attraction to the divine; it is like an *image* (εἰκὼν), and is drawn to knowledge immediately when it appears. Those people who have the *image* or the *likeness* of the divine are described as just and good, but moral excellence is not something one can develop in isolation. The just are those who have become *joined* within a collective. Salvation and moral growth is thus not an individual experience but a joint venture. However, in matter, there is no reflection of the divine and thus becoming entangled with matter, in *TriTrac* called being “mixed” (τῶσθ/τασθῆ), is associated with ignorance and ultimately destruction. The ontological and epistemological concerns are foundational for the ethical concerns in *TriTrac*. In this way *TriTrac* represents a Christian reception of the views common among Greco-Roman philosophers who claimed that understanding physics was crucial for the differentiation of good and bad things.⁹² Clement had maintained the very same thing.⁹³

91 George Boys-Stones, *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 101–105.

92 SVF III.68. Translation by Long and Sedley, *Hellenistic Philosophers*, 369.

93 At *Stromata* IV.25 Clement writes that “let us proceed from physics to the more clear ethics” (μετιτέον δὴ ἀπὸ τῶν φυσικωτέρων ἐπὶ τὰ προφανέστερα <τὰ> ἠθικά). Greek text from Otto Stählin, *Clemens Alexandrinus, Zweiter ban. Stromata buch I–VI* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1960).

In Part II, I return to the point that each individual has to be integrated within a whole in order to access knowledge and salvation. It is my contention that these epistemological and ontological details have bearing for ethics of a more practical nature: a person's moral agency is determined by its relationship with other people and the constitution of one's very being. In order for the psychic *likeness* and the pneumatic *image* to be able to reflect the truth they need to be integrated harmoniously. Psychic and pneumatic people also need to be *joined* with a community in order to reach salvation.⁹⁴ However, as will be discussed in further detail, not all people had what it took to be able to do this; some people were simply too lost to the illusions of material existence to be able to become members of a Christian community: they did not—indeed, they could not—listen to reason. This chapter should be viewed as a mere introduction to the ethics of the text from the perspective of 'hard sciences', such as physics and cognitive theory.

The way the workings of the human mind related to ethics will be explored further in the next chapter, but this time read from the perspective of the text's relation to ancient theories of emotions and their effect on human life. To understand how emotions related to human behavior we need to look at them in light of their function within ancient theories of cognition. Here, too, the theory of blending and its opposition, being mixed, become important. As we will see, being stable, restfully and harmoniously merged (ΤΗΤ) with the Pleroma, is described as resulting in certain positive feelings, while the opposite mixed state results in passions and negative feelings. The next chapter is devoted to exploring these emotions and the role they play in the ethics of *TriTrac*.

94 This is similar to what Aristotle argued, that each individual has a part to play in the whole. The human being is a "political animal" (πολιτικόν ζῷον), see for example *Politics* 1.1253a1–18.