Critical Notice:
Patristic Philosophy: A Critical Study


I should first acknowledge that I read two chapters of this book for suggestions prior to publication (see thanks on p. ix). The main value of this interesting work lies in the claim that at least some ancient Christian thinkers qualify as philosophers (although there would be many more patristic philosophers than those discussed here). Karamanolis [K.] maintains, with reason, that ancient Christianity cannot a priori be described as a religion that, as such, is incompatible with philosophy (17 and passim). I have often expressed a similar view.1 K. rightly notes that already in antiquity people like Galen, Lucian, and Celsus tried this move in order to attack Christianity—however, they could do so before Origen, but not later.2 I also entirely agree with K. that in antiquity philosophy and theology were not separated (17, 240) as they are in a post-Kantian perspective, that it is not the case that Christian thinkers practiced theology, but not philosophy (240), and that Origen wrote his Περὶ ἀρχῶν like other Platonists and not like other Christians: I have actually demonstrated precisely this with an extensive analysis in “Origen, Patristic Philosophy.”


K. observes, with good reason, that Christian philosophers did not merely appropriate Platonism or Stoicism (or, one may add, Aristotelian elements or even Skeptic arguments), but did so with a view to creating something new: the Christian doctrine (26). K.’s position is that the philosophy of early Christianity is part of ancient philosophy as a distinct school of thought, in addition to the Platonic school, the Stoic school, etc. (ix, 24, 240, and passim)—even though there are momentous philosophical divergences within patristic philosophy, for instance between Origen and Tertullian (provided that the label of patristic philosopher is granted to Tertullian). One might see uniformity, not so much within the Christian philosophical doctrine, whatever it may be, as within Christian Platonism. As I have also suggested, Origen, for example, aimed at creating an “orthodox” Christian Platonism, against “heresies” such as Marcionism and “Gnosticism,” as well as against competing philosophical systems such as Epicureanism, Stoicism, or Aristotelianism, and against “pagan” versions of Platonism. A systematic study of Origen as a philosopher is in the works.

A specific chronological range was chosen for this book: second to fourth century CE, to the exclusion of earlier thinkers such as Paul—whose commitment to philosophical ideas, especially Stoic ones, is debated—or later thinkers such as Ps. Dionysius, Maximus the Confessor, or Eriugena. I missed especially Dionysius and Eriugena as prominent Christian Neoplatonists, although I realize that choices had to be made. The book is thematically structured, with Chapter 1 devoted to philosophical methodology, Chapter 2 to physics, metaphysics, and cosmogony, Chapter 3 to logic and epistemology, Chapter 4 to freewill and providence, Chapter 5 to psychology and the soul-body relation, and Chapter 6 to ethics and politics.

The title of Celsus’ Ἀληθὴς λόγος is translated “True Account,” which is in fact the most widespread translation and is certainly one possibility. In addition, I suggest that Celsus chose a title that could resonate polemically with the main epinoia of Christ: Logos. On this hypothesis, Celsus was establishing and supporting “the true Logos” against the false Logos that is Christ. Indeed, he was arguing that the philosophical (Platonist) Logos was incompatible with Christ-Logos and the logos of Christianity, whereas Origen argued that the philosophical Logos was in fact Christ-Logos. Like Porphyry later, and apparently like those who continue to deny the very existence of a patristic philosophy, Celsus thought that philosophy was incompatible with Christianity. This is why Porphyry famously denounced the intellectual figure of Origen, the Christian

philosopher, as an impossible hybrid of a philosopher and a Christian—in his view, a great philosopher, whose fault was that of living like a Christian, while thinking like a Greek and applying Greek philosophical allegorical exegesis to the Jewish-Christian Bible. To Porphyry's mind, as to Celsus', this operation was an *adynaton*, because the Bible did not contain philosophical doctrines to be discovered through allegorical exegesis.

K’s classification of Porphyry as a Peripatetic as opposed to a Platonist (“Platonists such as Nicostratus, Lucius, and later Plotinus...,” while Peripatetics such as Andronicus, Boethus and Porphyry...,” 128) perhaps calls for an explanation, at least in a note, beyond the fact that Porphyry incorporated Peripatetic elements in Platonism and commented on Aristotle’s logical works in an attempt “to harmonise Aristotle’s logical writings with Platonism.”

K. provides a fine discussion of Clement of Alexandria’s theory of demonstration (121-129), and I think that Gregory of Nyssa remembered his teaching on the *κανών τῆς ἀληθείας* (Strom. 7.16.94.5) in *De an. 49D* GNO 3/3.33.11 on the *κανών παντὸς δόγματος*. I have only a minor perplexity concerning the reference to “*De Trinitate 15.27.49*” as a passage in which Clement speaks of the criteria of reason (121), since I am not aware of an extant oeuvre *On the Trinity* by Clement. K. points to philosophical parallels between Clement and the Middle Platonist Atticus (41). I found this particularly interesting, all the more so in the light of parallels I have pointed out between Atticus and Origen in cosmology, theology and psychology. These striking parallels mainly concern the soul of God the Creator. In this connection it is noteworthy that, as K. remarks (63), Atticus was among the Platonists who identified Plato’s demiurge with the Form of the Good in the *Republic*. Indeed, in an articulate treatment of cosmology, within the chapter on physics and metaphysics, K. rightly notes that, since Plato’s demiurge is characterized by goodness and wisdom, some Platonists identified him with the Form of the Good, while others identified the Form of the Good with a God higher than the demiurge. Among the former were Atticus and Longinus. Very interestingly, Atticus is likely to have influenced

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Origen in his conception of the demiurge, in particular concerning the soul of the creator god; Atticus may thus also have facilitated Origen’s identification of God the Creator with Plato’s Good. If Atticus influenced Clement, it is even more probable that he may have had an impact on Origen.

K. is also right to note (42) that, contrary to the general wholesale rejection of Epicureanism by Christian authors, Clement admitted that even the Epicureans had some good doctrines. A thorough investigation into Christian thinkers’ evaluations of Epicureanism has indeed suggested that Clement, together with Gregory Nazianzen, is among the very few exceptions to the wholesale rejection of the philosophy of the Garden.6 K. points out a remarkable parallel between the Cappadocians’—but I would say already Origen’s7—notion of the Christian God as μία οὐσία, τρεῖς υπόστασεις and Porphyry’s representation of the One as transcendent but also as source of all beings, in which sense it is a triad of Father, Life, and Intellect, a triad that is, at the same time, a unity (115). K. follows the hypothesis that the Cappadocians depended on Porphyry. I certainly agree that they knew Porphyry, though they also, and probably primarily, depended on Origen on this score. It is even possible that Porphyry in turn was influenced by Origen; this is why he would seem to have attributed to Plotinus Origen’s technical Trinitarian meaning of υπόστασις in one of the most famous of Plotinus’s treatises: Περὶ τῶν τριῶν ἀρχικῶν υποστάσεων.8 In this way Porphyry was describing Plotinus’ principles in Origen’s terms (Plotinus’s own use of υπόστασις is different and less technical). The same distinction of common ousia, essence or nature, and individual substances, as drawn for the Trinity by Gregory of Nyssa, is also drawn by Gregory himself—as already by Origen, I add—for humanity: all humans share in a common λόγος τῆς οὐσίας, but each human is an individual υπόστασις characterized by certain properties or ἰδιώματα (114). I note that Gregory in fact was under the influence of Origen, to the point of using Origen’s very phrase λόγος τῆς οὐσίας in this discussion as elsewhere.

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7 Indeed, that οὐσία and υπόστασις in the Trinitarian sense “were used interchangeably by earlier Christians such as Origen” (113) is true as for several Christians prior to the Cappadocians, but not with regard to Origen, who actually can be deemed the inventor of the technical Trinitarian meaning of υπόστασις; it is from him that the Cappadocians (and perhaps even “pagan” Platonists) drew it. Documentation in the following note.
On the subject of Tertullian’s claim, made ca. 200 CE, to the effect that abortion is tantamount to murder (De an. 25), K. comments that this was “a novelty in the Graeco-Roman world” (197). This is largely, but not entirely, true. For at least the “pagan” Stoic Musonius Rufus, in the second half of the first century CE, had maintained much the same, arguing for the impiety of abortion and infant exposure. K. is correct to observe that in his work Against Fate Gregory of Nyssa does not support his arguments with Scripture, because as a philosopher he intends to use the tools of reason. I would add that Gregory’s strategy may have been influenced by his main source of inspiration for this treatise, Bardaisan of Edessa’s work Against Fate, which did not buttress its arguments by means of Scripture either, to the extent that some scholars have even, misguidedly, questioned that Bardaisan was a Christian. K. does well to highlight also the issue raised by Tertullian, as to why God endowed human beings with free will, since he knew that this would bring sin into the world, and to note that the same question would be tackled by Origen too (165). I may add that the very same problem was addressed by Bardaisan slightly earlier; it figures prominently at the beginning of the Liber legum regionum—based on Bardaisan’s Against Fate—in the discussion between Bardaisan and Awida.

K. rightly remarks that Tatian was the first in a series of Christian thinkers who set out to discredit astral determinism, with Clement, Origen, and the Cappadocians to follow (161), before reiterating that Origen criticized astral determinism, which had been debated since the times of Justin (171). There, too, I note that Bardaisan, even slightly before Clement and Origen, had devoted an entire work, Against Fate, to the refutation of astral determinism, to the extent of contributing a new argument against it. Also, when in the chapter on psychology, K. points out that Tatian described spirit as God’s gift to human beings, and that, unlike his teacher, Justin stressed the ignorance of the soul and its affinity to matter in Or. 13.2-3 (190), it seems interesting to me to note that this is also the position of Bardaisan, who knew Tatian’s Diatessaron and probably also his Oration. It is indeed very likely that Bardaisan actually


10 For the demonstration of Gregory’s dependence on Bardaisan, see my Bardaisan of Edessa: A Reassessment of the Evidence and a New Interpretation, Piscataway: Gorgias, 2009, 138-142.

conceived of human beings as divided into body, vital soul, which is in itself ignorant, and the intellectual soul, that is, intellect/spirit, regarded as the divine element in each human being.

K. correctly points out that Justin’s vocabulary of freewill, even if used in polemic with Stoic fatalistic determinism, has Stoic origins: προαίρεσις, αὐτεξούσιον, τὸ ἐφ´ ἡμῖν (158). Here again, I note a parallel with Bardaisan, who also contrasted fatalistic necessitarianism while, at the same time, using Stoic freedom terminology, as is clear both from the Syriac Liber legum regionum and, even more so, from Eusebius’ fragments of his refutation of fate: αὐτεξούσιον, αὐτεξούσιον τοῦ θελήματος. Eusebius could have provided his own, or a collaborator’s, version from the Syriac, but he could also have found the text already in Greek, since not only was Bardaisan himself bilingual, but his disciples are reported to have translated his works into Greek shortly after their composition. K. never takes into account Bardaisan’s thought, not even en passant; this lack, however, is common to virtually all other historians and philosophers who have treated of such aspects of patristic philosophy. This is a pity, since Bardaisan is extremely interesting as an early Christian philosopher steeped in Middle Platonism and Stoicism, both in himself and for the influence he exerted on a number of patristic thinkers such as Eusebius, Didymus, Gregory of Nyssa, Diodore of Tarsus and others, possibly also Origen.

Bardaisan was even known to “pagan” Neoplatonists such as Porphyry, who directly quoted him, and, very likely, also Plotinus. Indeed, as K. himself observes (172), Plotinus in Enn. 3.1.8.9-14 teaches that the nobler soul has more power of self-determination and freewill and is less influenced by the “secondary causes,” or chance-causes, that are the domain of fate; a poorer soul, which submits to the bodily nature, is more subject to fate. Plotinus also posits Nature in 3.1.1, and urges his disciples to return to their intellectual self, which is not subject to fate (Enn. 3.3.9). These are exactly the three domains that Bardaisan postulated in his treatise Against Fate. These are reflected in the Liber legum regionum, which posits the three principles of Nature, ruling on bodies, fate, ruling on the lower, vital soul, and free will, which depends on intellect, the noblest part of the soul, free from fate.

K. offers a very concise, but substantially correct, presentation of Origen’s theory of apokatastasis (239), rightly stating that for Origen human free will is

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12 E.g. the monographs listed below in fn. 30 and Charlotte Köckert, Christliche Kosmologie und kaiserzeitliche Philosophie. Die Auslegung des Schöpfungsberichtes bei Origenes, Basilius und Gregor von Nyssa vor dem Hintergrund kaiserzeitlicher Timaeus-Interpretationen, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2009. This work, however, is otherwise fine.
not at odds with divine grace (176), which is also one major pillar of his apokatastasis doctrine. K. could perhaps have cited Comm. in Rom. 4.10 to support this. I would only object that it is not really the case that “the majority of Christian theologians after the Council of Nicaea will reject this view,” [apokatastasis] (239) as I have extensively shown elsewhere how widespread in fact this doctrine was, at least until the fifth century. Basil of Caesarea, or a text ascribed to him, explicitly attests that most Christians still believed in apokatastasis in his day, that is—depending on the attribution—at the end of the fourth century or in the fifth or early sixth. The same is testified to by Augustine in the early fifth century. I also add as very interesting, in relation to Origen’s apokatastasis theory, that Origen was correcting Plato when he claimed that no one is “incurable” for his or her Creator (Princ. 3.6.5), whereas Plato had repeatedly contended that some souls, having committed too grave ἀδικίαι, are ἀνίατοι and therefore will be tormented in Tartarus forever, since their suffering cannot be healing, but only retributive. There is just one potentially misleading statement concerning Origen’s cosmology and eschatology: K. seems to imply that for Origen apokatastasis occurs at the end of every aeon or cosmic cycle, as in Stoic cosmology: “the initial order of the world will be restored through another cosmic cycle, a view reminiscent of the Stoic doctrine of an innumerable succession of worlds,” emphasis mine (202). In fact, one of the main differences between the Stoic apokatastasis theory and Origen’s is precisely that the Stoics postulated infinite cycles of restoration, whereas Origen posited one universal restoration at the end of a finite sequence of aeons, when eternity (ἀϊδιότης) will replace time.

K. rightly ascribes to Plotinus the idea that virtue is a necessary condition for contemplation, particularly for contemplating God (221). It is also remarkable, I add, that this very same idea emerges in Christian Neoplatonists such as Gregory of Nyssa and especially Evagrius, both of whom knew Plotinus well. K. correctly adduces Porphyry ap. Eus. HE 6.19 as testimony that Origen was born a “pagan” (245). To this testimony I would add that—usually overlooked—of

13 “I do not deny in the least that the rational nature will always keep its free will, but I declare that the power and effectiveness of Christ’s cross and of his death […] are so great as to be enough to set right and save, not only the present and the future aeon, but also all the past ones, and not only this order of us humans, but also the heavenly orders and powers.”

14 In The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis.

15 See my Tempo ed eternità in età antica e patristica: filosofia greca, ebraismo e cristianesimo, Assisi: Cittadella, 2015, 9-21; 107-125.
Marcellus of Ancyra, fr. 88 Klostermann = fr. 22 Seibt/Vinzent, in which Origen is said to have at a certain point “detached himself from the philosophical disciplines” and to have turned to Scripture only at that point in time, “but before having an accurate grasp of the Bible.” This is why he was still “led astray by philosophical arguments, because of which he wrote some things incorrectly.” For instance, his treatise Περὶ ἀρχῶν was influenced too heavily by Plato, according to Marcellus. This is why Eusebius was anxious to note that, while Origen did write a Περὶ ἀρχῶν, Plato never did and that Origen did not teach the same doctrines as Plato on protology (C. Marc. 1.4.27).

K’s account of the fall according to Origen and the role of freewill and laziness therein (171-173) is good; I agree that Origen was inspired by Plato’s myth of Er—which I would see as crucial to Origen’s theodicy especially for the principle, already deployed by Clement, ἀρετὴ δὲ ἀδέσποτον ἢ ἀὶ τὶς ἑλομένου, θεὸς ἀναίτιος. I only doubt that Origen postulated prelapsarian “disembodied intellects” (171). This is a widespread assumption, but there are reasons to believe that, for Origen, the logika were disembodied only when they were ideal projects in the mind of God, but not after their actual creation as independent substances. Before the fall, they all had spiritual, immortal, light, and luminous bodies, angelic bodies. K. notes: “that these [sc. intellects] are disembodied is especially important, because they are not subject to the needs imposed by the body” (172). Now, this is certainly true of a postlapsarian body, with its corruptibility and passions, but not of the angelic-like body, which poses no impediment to the intellect. Likewise, the following claims concerning Origen’s protology align with the most common view, which I suspect is inaccurate: “To the extent that Origen subscribes to the thesis of the soul’s preexistence, he inherits the relevant problems” (184); for Origen, “the soul that enlivens the body is a fallen intellect, which existed in a disembodied state living a life of thinking” (193); “for Origen, the fact that we are in a body and we have a soul that operates in the body is indicative of our failure to retain our original state of disembodied intellects” (202). Although it is a prevalent surmise that Origen upheld the preexistence of disembodied souls to (their) bodies, there are many good reasons to doubt this and to think that the “preexistence of souls” in his case should be at least qualified: what preexists the earthly, heavy, mortal body—not the body tout court—is probably not a bare soul, but a rational creature or λογικὸν, endowed with a fine,

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16 Since I cannot repeat here all the relevant texts and arguments, I must refer to my “Preexistence of Souls? The ἀρχὴ and τέλος of Rational Creatures in Origen and Some Origenians,” in Studia Patristica LVI.4, ed. Markus Vinzent, Leuven: Peeters, 2013, 167-226. Further research is ongoing on this point.
spiritual, and immortal body. Similarly, “Origen’s view that the human soul descends into the body because it loses its original goodness” (178) is a statement that reflects the long-standing vulgata about Origen, inherited from the ancient Origenistic controversy. The statement ought to be qualified: due to sin, the soul does not descend into a body for the first time while being disembodied beforehand, but rather descends into an earthly, mortal body, or has its fine, immortal, angelic body changed into mortal and corruptible.

The following remark also reflects a broad consensus that can nevertheless be challenged: “According to Gregory [Nyssen], human corporeality is not a fruit of the fall of the soul or of sin, as is suggested in Plato’s Phaedrus and as Origen claimed (De an. 112C-113C)” (212). For Origen, not human corporeality tout court, but only mortal, corruptible corporeality, and the “ridiculous” corporeality of demons, are a fruit of the fall. Gregory, very probably, is not criticizing Origen, as is generally assumed, but “pagan” and “Gnostic” Platonism, perhaps also Manichaeism.17 The reading of Gregory Nyssen in opposition to Origen is susceptible of being corrected, and this correction is being undertaken in a systematic investigation. In this connection, K. is right to present Nyssen’s view that the resurrection is the restoration of human nature to its original state before sin as close to Origen’s own concept of apokatastasis (213), but it is questionable that—as is often assumed—Gregory’s “starting point is a substantially different position on the nature of the human soul” (213).

Gregory Nyssen “offers a sophisticated theory of the soul, which challenges Origen’s” (204) and distances himself from Origen’s “preexistence thesis” by claiming that “soul and body come about together, there is no preexistence of the one or the other” (207). It occurs frequently to find Gregory and Origen opposed in this way. However, it is probable that for Origen too soul and body come about together (intellectual soul + spiritual body), and there are many clues—among which the perishability axiom and the analogy between protological and eschatological bodies—that suggest that for Gregory the soul, which for him too is primarily the intellectual soul, may have come into being not together with the mortal body, but with a spiritual body. If this be the case, Gregory’s position, far from being the opposite of Origen’s, would be the same as Origen’s. Investigation is still going on in this respect.

In Gregory’s definition of the soul, οὐσία γεννητή, οὐσία ζῶσα, νοερά, σώματι ὀργανικῷ καὶ αἰσθητικῷ δύναμιν ζωτικὴν καὶ τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἀντιληπτικὴν δι’ ἑαυτῆς ἐνιεῖσα, ἕως ἂν ἡ δεκτικὴ τούτων συνεστήκῃ φύσις (De an. 29B; GNO 3/3.15.6-9), K. expressly (279) follows my reading ἐνιεῖσα, from ἐνίημι, which has ms. support, 17 Some arguments in my “Gregory of Nyssa’s Purported Criticism of Origen’s Purported Doctrine of the Preexistence of Souls,” forthcoming.
instead of Migne’s correction, ἐνιεῖσα (my reading is now also kept in Ekkehard Mühlenberg’s GNO edition, p. 15.8). K. translates: “a created substance, living, intellectual, which through itself provides a faculty of life and a faculty of cognition of perceptible things in a body equipped with organs and potentially perceiving, as far as nature can admit” (206). Maybe “infuses, introduces, puts in” would be a more accurate translation for ἐνιεῖσα than “provides,” though the general sense of the definition does not change much. Especially, ἕως ἂν ἡ δεκτικὴ τούτων συνεστήκη φύσις means, not exactly “as far as nature can admit,” but “as long as the nature that can receive these faculties subsists,” i.e. as long as the body is alive. After the death of the body, the soul continues to exist as a created, living, and intellectual substance, but it ceases to infuse in the body the faculties of life and sense-perception. The full relation between the soul and its body will be restored at the resurrection.

Gregory’s attention to psychology was itself mainly a legacy of Origen. In granting much importance to psychology, Origen in turn was following a tradition of Christian thinkers who wrote whole treatises on the human soul, like Justin and Tertullian, as K. correctly remarks (186), although his approach was quite different from that of a Tertullian, and certainly Origen was also following the “pagan” philosophical tradition περὶ ψυχῆς. He never wrote a treatise περὶ ψυχῆς himself, because—as he explained—this subject was large, difficult to unravel, and uncertain, and the apostles left the origin of the soul unclarified,18 but he refers to the philosophical tradition περὶ ψυχῆς in Comm. in Io. 2.182 and again in Comm. in Cant. 2.5.21-28, where, in a “zetetic” fashion, he lists the main issues of philosophical psychology.

In a fine discussion of Basil’s and Gregory of Nyssa’s anti-Eunomian theory of divine names (136-137), K. rightly notes that Basil regarded divine names or επινοιαῖ, including “Father” and “Son,” as expressing not substances or essences (οὐσίαι), but only properties (ἰδιώματα). I only add that, more specifically, Gregory argued—like Philo, Origen, and Plotinus—that the divine essence is beyond the grasp of human intellects and beyond expression (apophaticism)19 and that the names of Father and Son denote, not a substance, but a relation (σχέσις; Aristotle’s category of τὸ πρός τι).20 Also, generally speaking, it is surely the case that Christian thinkers deemed God the only principle of the world

18 Comm. in Io. 6.85; Pamph. Apol. 8.
and ontologically different from it, i.e. transcendent, and therefore could not agree with Platonic ontology, either three-tier—i.e. positing God, Forms, and matter as the principles of the cosmos—or two-tier, i.e. positing God and matter (107). One should consider, however, that there were exceptions in terms of ancient Christian thinkers who, like Justin, Clement, and later Calcidius, did not postulate the creation of matter by God (creatio ex nihilo), but rather assumed the preexistence of a substratum to which God lent qualities, forms, and order. The aforementioned Bardaisan might be added to these thinkers, but this is uncertain, given that he did describe creation as an ordering of pre-existent “elements” or “beings” by Christ-Logos, but he also represented these elements as in turn created by God.

K. offers a good treatment (101-106) of the problem of creation in Gregory of Nyssa: how the immaterial God created the material world by thinking immaterial qualities, the combination of which produces matter. K. points to partial parallels in Plotinus and Porphyry—and implicitly in Origen, dealt with on p. 96, although the derivation is never made explicit—and refers to the discussions of this problem in Nyssen by Sorabji and Hibbs. Other interesting discussions of the same issue are those of Cinzia Arruzza and—too late to be taken into account by K.—Anna Marmodoro. K.’s discussion of matter as only theoretically, but not factually, separable from its qualities according to Origen (92-93) is valuable and would be worth putting in conversation with the view that emerges from the Dialogue of Adamantius, where the character of Adamantius expresses philosophical views that correspond to those (authentic) of Origen, in this as well as in many other respects.

The treatment of Evagrius’s tempting thoughts or λογισμοί (175) is correct, as is the continuity highlighted by K. between Origen’s cogitationes/λογισμοί and Evagrius’s tempting thoughts. I think, however, that in the translation-paraphrase of Praktikos 6, πάθη κινεῖν would be better rendered “to stir up


passions / bad emotions / negative affections” than “to stir up further affections,” both because the πάθη, in the technical meaning of the term coming principally from Stoic ethics, are not any affections or emotions, but only the bad ones, and because here πάθη are distinct from the λογισμοί, which are not yet passions (using “further” in reference to πάθη, instead, may suggest that λογισμοί also are πάθη). But if we indulge them, then we give them power to stir up πάθη—and here is where sin comes in, for Origen as for Evagrius, as K. notes well.

On some specific theological points, which are more marginal to his subject, K. seems to follow an old vulgata that is questionable and does not stand more careful investigation, such as the idea that Eusebius’s “respect for Origen’s views led him to come close to Arius’s subordinationist theology” (246). In fact Eusebius, precisely because he was following Origen, was neither an “Arian” or “semi-Arian,” nor a subordinationist.24 Similarly, the claim that Arius maintained, “like Origen, that the Son is subordinate to the Father” (111) is true of Arius but debatable with respect to Origen. On the other hand, K. rightly acknowledges that “Origen never said” that there was a time when the Son did not exist (110). What’s more, I would like to observe, Origen explicitly argued, long before Arius, that there was no time when the Son did not exist since he is consubstantial with the Father. Athanasius quoted ad verbum Origen’s argument in support of his own anti-Arian point.25 Origen even imported the formula οὐκ ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν from ‘pagan’ cosmological philosophical debates into Christian Trinitarian and Christological theories, as I have thoroughly argued elsewhere.26 Likewise, I found the following assertion somehow problematic: “Origen’s views on the status of God were embraced by Eusebius and others, the so-called Origenists, but they also met with criticism from Methodius, Gregory of Nyssa, Epiphanius” (245). Gregory of Nyssa, in fact, far from criticising Origen’s theology, followed it, to the point of deriving from him, for instance, both the μία οὐσία τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις principle and the Trinitarian notion of ὑπόστασις;27 the latter, as K. himself acknowledges (110-111), was first used by Origen. Also, K. draws an opposition between Paul’s preference for celibacy over marriage in 1 Cor 7 and his approval of marriage “in later letters,”

25 See the essay mentioned in the preceding note.
27 As argued in the above-mentioned “Origen’s Anti-Subordinationism” and “Origen, Greek Philosophy.”
with reference to 1 Tim 2:15; 5:14 (228). In fact, 1 Timothy is pseudepigraphic, as almost all New Testament scholars maintain, so the contrast is not between two apparently contradictory positions of Paul, but between a position of Paul and another one that only purports to be of Paul.

K. is right to remark that, even though ancient Christian thinkers regarded Scripture—and not Plato or other philosophers—as authoritative, nevertheless the Bible “is not the tool they used to articulate their views on philosophical issues such as the nature of matter, the question of free will, or the soul-body relation” (237). What they used is in fact philosophy. Scholars in ancient philosophy “do not always appreciate that early Christian thinkers”—or at least the best among them—“are no less philosophical than contemporary pagan philosophers” (238). I agree that, at least in some cases, Christian philosophers did not simply appropriate and recast “pagan” philosophical materials, and that it is misguided to conceive of ancient Christian thought as a special case, different from ancient philosophy (239). Indeed, Christian thinkers not only relied on philosophical strategies commonly used by ancient philosophers, but also on interpretive methods that make their appeal to Scripture parallel to “pagan” Platonists’ recourse to Plato (59). I have argued elsewhere in a detailed manner that both Stoic and Platonic allegorists, just as Origen,28 regarded and treated their very hermeneutics as part and parcel of philosophy—this is also why Origen included his treatment of biblical exegesis not in an exegetical work, but in his philosophical masterpiece.

I fully agree with K. that we should be wary of the sharp opposition between “pagan” eudaimonistic ethics and Christian soteriological perspectives (223); not only did “pagan” philosophers speak of salvation in late antiquity, but Christians also were ultimately eudaimonistic and conceived of the eschatological, soteriological end as the supreme fulfilment of happiness. Thus, Christian ethics is both eudaimonistic and soteriological and the soteriological dimension is also present in late antique “pagan” philosophy, especially Neoplatonism (when, as has often been observed, this philosophical school verged toward the “religious”). This is evident, for instance, in Hermias’ attribution of a salvific value to the correct, i.e. symbolic, interpretation of Plato’s myths and of his dialogues more generally (e.g. In Phaedr. 241E8, with an echo

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from Plato’s Republic). All in all, K.’s book is an important book, intended also for a non-specialist public, which anyone interested in ancient philosophy and/or early Christianity should read.

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29 On which see Vishwa Adluri, “Plato’s Saving Mūthos: The Language of Salvation in the Republic,” International Journal of the Platonic Tradition 8 (2014) 3-32, who argues that the notion of salvation in the Republic reworks the Homeric nostos of Odysseus into Parmenidean ontology, so to conceive of salvation as a vertical ascent to the transcendent world.

30 Other monographs on patristic philosophy are available, such as Harry Wolfson, The Philosophy of the Church Fathers (3rd ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970); Eric Osborn, The Beginning of Christian Philosophy (reprint Cambridge: CUP, 2009) on Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement; Christopher Stead, Philosophy in Christian Antiquity (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), which targets a non-specialist audience. K.’s book differs from these in method, aims, and scope. Typos are rare, e.g. “does not mean the God the Father” for “that God the Father” (112); “a close look at their texts have shown” (238) for “has shown”; primi, naturali motus (174) for primi, naturales motus.