

USE YOUR ILLUSION: ‘CRITIAS’ ON RELIGION RECONSIDERED

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Much of the discussion of this fragment (Critias *TrGF* 43 F 19 Snell) has centred on the identity of its author, which was disputed in antiquity: Critias, according to Sextus Empiricus (*adv. Math.* 9.54 and *Pyrrh.* 3.218) — our only source to quote the fragment fully; according to Aetius (1.7.2) and [Plut.] (*de Placitis Philosophorum* 880e), Euripides. But such a question has no bearing on my approach here, and I will simply refer to ‘Critias’ as author for the sake of convenience.¹ Of more importance, however, is that the document (henceforth Critias F 19) is universally accepted as coming from a fifth-century drama, even if its genre remains in doubt. None of the sources for this fragment names the play from which it originates, nor is it said to come specifically from a satyr-play, but the usual view has been that it is satyric because Aetius, who cites only part of the fragment, attributes the words to the Sisyphus who, as a notorious rogue and trickster, is arguably more suited to satyric drama than tragedy.² A linguistic consideration namely, the diminutive $\chi\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\omicron\nu$ at l. 39, has also been cited to support satyric status.³ Diminutives are virtually non-existent in tragedy,⁴ a medium not well suited to their colloquial flavour, but are well attested in our much scantier remains of satyric drama (e.g., Eur. *Cyc.*, 185, 266-7, 316; *Autolycus* A F 282.2, etc.), although are not exclusive to the genre, and $\chi\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\omicron\nu$ itself is common in fifth-century prose and Old Comedy.⁵

¹ Wilamowitz (1875) 166-72 postulated that the fragment came from the satyr play, *Sisyphus*, supposedly part of a tetralogy by Critias of c. 407 BC whose tragedies included *Tennes*, *Rhadamanthys*, *Pirithous*; although many now reject the particulars of such a view, an increasing number of scholars has favoured Critias as author at least of F 19: the fragment is attributed to Critias in standard collections of dramatic or philosophical fragments, e.g. by B. Snell in *TrGF* vol. I; H. Diels and W. Kranz in *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 6th ed., Berlin 1952 (F 19=DK 88 B 25); R. Krumeich, N. Pechstein and B. Seidensticker [=KPS] (1999) 552-61; see also D. Sutton (1981), W. Burkert (1985) 314, M. Wianarczyk (1987) 35-45, M. Davies (1989). But others favouring Euripides include A. Dihle (1977); R. Scodel (1980); H. Yunis (1988); P. Voelke (2001) 358. For summaries of the evidence and arguments, with full bibliography, see most recently C. Collard (2007), 55-68, and Collard and Cropp II (2008), Appendix, 629-35, who ultimately conclude that the evidence — verbal style, metre and ‘atheistic’ content — does not clearly indicate one poet more than the other as the likelier author of the fragment.

² Sisyphus figured in many plays: Aeschylus’ *Sisyphus* (F 225-34 Radt); Euripides’ *Autolycus* A (F 282 Kannicht) and *Sisyphus*: the satyr-play of the so-called ‘Trojan trilogy’ of 415 B.C., *Alexander*, *Palamedes* and *Trojan Women*. A two-word fragment survives of Sophocles’ *Sisyphus*, (F 545 Radt) but its genre is disputed; Sisyphus may have been a character in Aeschylus’ *Theoioi* (see, e.g., KPS (1999) 140 n. 40) and probably appeared in Achaëus’ *Aethon* (F 6-11); cf. Hesiod F 43a.18-43 (M-W) and for discussion, see Sutton (1980) 70; KPS (1999) 555-6. It may seem reasonable to infer that the speaker is Sisyphus, but not even this is certain; still less is it necessary for my argument.

³ See, for instance, Scodel (1980) 124; Sutton (1981) 36; Davies (1989) 29; KPS (1999) 555.

⁴ Stevens (1976) 5 n. 12 identifies only one definite colloquial form in tragedy, $\chi\lambda\alpha\nu\acute{\iota}\delta\iota\omicron\nu$ at Eur. *Or.* 42; *Suppl.* 110; Chaeremon F 14.9; F tr. adesp. 7; cf. Sutton (1981) 36 n. 19.

⁵ E.g., Hdt. 1.98.17; Thuc. 1.13.7; Antiphon, *Herod.* 22.3; for Old Comedy, see, e.g. Ar. *Ach.* 998; *Clouds* 152; $\chi\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\omicron\nu$ is a diminutive only in form, with the further diminutive $\chi\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\delta\iota\omicron\nu$ implying smallness of place; e.g. Lysias, 19.28, Menander, *Dyscolus* 23.

Another major issue in the fragment's reception has been its atheistic content, which I intend to discuss here, but not for any biographical purposes or establishing the author or genre of the piece. The atheistic content of this fragment, which posits the social origins of belief in the gods, has often been considered a shrewd and cynical denunciation of religion *per se* and it is with this response that I wish to take issue. No less an authority than Walter Burkert, who rightly discussed the fragment within the intellectual currents of its time, saw it as 'dangerous' to conventional religious sensibilities, taking the skepticism of the sophistic age to new iconoclastic levels.⁶ Malcolm Davies' detailed discussion of the piece concludes with a selection of interesting quotes from David Hume and Edward Gibbon amongst others on the idea of religion as an erroneous and oppressive invention exploiting the ignorance of the masses through fear, and concludes: 'Perhaps enough has been quoted to convey just how similar the views of the eighteenth-century scholars of the Enlightenment were to those expressed in our 42 lines.'⁷ He goes on to quote J.G. Frazer, whom he describes as 'one of the last subscribers to ... the Enlightenment' and his biographer, Ackerman, who both add the idea of a cynical, savvy priest-class as the inventors of religion who gain power for themselves as a result.⁸ But Davies' own verdict on the fragment suggests that Frazer is far from alone in still adhering to Enlightenment values which, when taken uncritically, can lead to a distorted reading of it. Robert Parker sees our fragment as one of the 'radical criticisms' of religion advanced by the sophists and suggests it would have had the same 'ugly atheistic implications' as mechanistic accounts of the universe in the eyes of fifth-century traditionalists.⁹ The idea that the fragment contains a sardonic or cynical undermining of religion is evident in some of specious translations that have appeared over the years.¹⁰

But I wish to suggest that close examination of the fragment indicates otherwise.¹¹ Some have recognized this to a certain degree, among them W.K.C. Guthrie, who noted that the fragment 'reverses the increasing volume of criticism which attacked the gods on moral grounds' and saw the sentiments expressed in it as motivated by a 'demand for a supernatural sanction of moral behaviour'.¹² Sutton

⁶ Burkert (1985) 311-17, esp. 314-15.

⁷ Davies (1989) 30-1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁹ Parker (1996) 212. J. de Romilly (1992) 108 also linked the fragment to the first Sophistic, calling it 'the most outspoken of all the texts ... hostile to religion'. Elsewhere (*ib.* 194), however, she saw in it 'an encouragement for piety'.

¹⁰ See below n. 19.

¹¹ Despite the loss of dramatic context, the fragment does not defy interpretation altogether, and any reading of the fragment that depends on some putative reconstruction of the play's plot inevitably rests on a circular argument.

¹² Guthrie (1971) 244.

correctly noted that the fragment presents religion as a ‘benign swindle that produced the advance of human culture’ and to bolster this view quoted Isocrates’ *Busiris* (24-5), which speaks of the benefits to society brought by those who encourage belief in the gods, albeit through exaggerating divine punishments and rewards; yet those responsible for such a belief system, says Isocrates, have stopped us from behaving in bestial fashion to each other and thus done humanity the greatest benefit.¹³ Jon Hesk also argues that the fragment ‘posits the possibility of a socially and morally constructive context for deception’ and sees it as a parallel to Plato’s ‘noble lie’ while acknowledging its different content and purpose from its Platonic counterpart.¹⁴ And in her recent source book on Greek religion, Emily Kearns also notes that our fragment contains no hint of parody of sophistic ideas, but rather a coherent and plausible theory involving the idea of a ‘first inventor’ and origins of cultural change and advance.¹⁵ These scholars are right to see that the fragment does not comprise a simple denunciation of religion, but we may go further and see significant links between the benefits of religion as outlined in the fragment and the thought of Protagoras, Democritus, Antiphon, Gorgias and the Anonymus Iamblichi among others. I will argue, then, that, when seen more fully in the context of these and other contemporaneous texts, Critias’ presentation of religion in F 19 is couched in notably more positive terms than is often assumed.

While considerations of space prevent a full analysis of Critias F 19 (Snell), the fragment is worth citing in full.

{ΣΙΣ.} ἦν χρόνος ὅτ’ ἦν ἄτακτος ἀνθρώπων βίος
καὶ θηριώδης ἰσχύος θ’ ὑπηρετής,
ὅτ’ οὐδὲν ἄθλον οὔτε τοῖς ἐσθλοῖσιν ἦν
οὔτ’ αὖ κόλασμα τοῖς κακοῖς ἐγίγνετο.
κάπειτά μοι δοκοῦσιν ἄνθρωποι νόμους (5)
θέσθαι κολαστάς, ἵνα δίκη τύραννος ἦ
<...> τήν θ’ ὕβριν δούλην ἔχη·

ἐζημιούτο δ’ εἴ τις ἐξαμαρτάνοι.
ἔπειτ’ ἐπειδὴ τὰμφανῆ μὲν οἱ νόμοι
ἀπείργον αὐτοὺς ἔργα μὴ πράσσειν βία, (10)
λάθρα δ’ ἔπρασσον, τημικαυτά μοι δοκεῖ

<...> πυκνός τις καὶ σοφὸς γνώμην ἀνὴρ
<θεῶν> δέος θνητοῖσιν ἐξευρεῖν, ὅπως
εἴη τι δείμα τοῖς κακοῖσι, κὰν λάθρα
πράσσωσιν ἢ λέγωσιν ἢ φρονῶσί <τι>. (15)

¹³ Sutton (1981) 38.

¹⁴ See Hesk (2000) 179-88, esp. 182, 186. But at the same time he sees the fragment as staging the ‘danger’ of presenting certain forms of traditional truths as noble lies, and sees it as involving a ‘questioning of questioning itself’ (188). What he calls ‘danger’ I would see rather as irony or paradox.

¹⁵ Kearns (2010) 36; she plausibly quotes Democritus B 30 D-K (cf. also id. B 75 D-K) as a parallel to our fragment (esp, lines 27-39) that the idea of the gods arose through fear of natural phenomena contained in the heavens.

έντεῦθεν οὖν τὸ θεῖον εἰσηγήσατο,
 ὡς ἔστι δαίμων ἀφθίτῳ θάλλων βίῳ
 νόῳ τ' ἀκούων καὶ βλέπων, φρονῶν τε καὶ
 προσέχων τε ταῦτα καὶ φύσιν θείαν φορῶν,
 ὃς πᾶν {μέν} τὸ λεχθέν ἐν βροτοῖς ἀκούσεται, (20)
 <τὸ> δρώμενον δὲ πᾶν ἰδεῖν δυνήσεται.

ἐὰν δὲ σὺν σιγῇ τι βουλευῆς κακόν,
 τοῦτ' οὐχὶ λήσει τοὺς θεοὺς· τὸ γὰρ φρονοῦν
 <...> ἔνεστι. τούσδε τοὺς λόγους λέγων
 διδαγμάτων ἥδιστον εἰσηγήσατο (25)

ψευδεῖ καλύψας τὴν ἀλήθειαν λόγῳ.
 <ναίειν> δ' ἔφασκε τοὺς θεοὺς ἐνταῦθ' ἵνα
 μάλιστ' ἄν' ἐξέπληξεν ἀνθρώπους ἄγων,
 ὅθεν περ ἔγνω τοὺς φόβους ὄντας βροτοῖς
 καὶ τὰς ὀνήσεις τῷ ταλαιπώρῳ βίῳ, (30)

ἐκ τῆς ὑπερθε περιφορᾶς, ἵν' ἀστραπᾶς
 κατείδον οὔσας, δεινὰ δὲ κτυπήματα
 βροντῆς τό τ' ἀστερωπὸν οὐρανοῦ δέμας,
 Χρόνου καλὸν ποίκιλμα, τέκτονος σοφοῦ,
 ὅθεν τε λαμπρὸς ἀστέρος στείχει μύδρος (35)

ὃ θ' ὑγρὸς εἰς γῆν ὄμβρος ἐκπορεύεται.
 τοίους πέριξ ἔστησεν ἀνθρώποις φόβους,
 δι' οὓς καλῶς τε τῷ λόγῳ κατώκισεν
 τὸν δαίμον' οὗτος ἐν πρέποντι χωρίῳ,
 τὴν ἀνομίαν τε τοῖς νόμοις κατέσβεσεν (40)

**
 οὕτω δὲ πρῶτον οἶομαι πείσαι τινα
 θνητοὺς νομίζειν δαιμόνων εἶναι γένος.

28 ἐξέπληξεν Sextus: ἐκπλήξειεν Grotius; ἄγων suspect: λέγων Grotius 30 ὀνήσεις Musgrave: ποιήσεις Sextus

<SISYPHUS?> There was a time when the life of humans was disordered, and beast-like and subject to brute strength, when there was no prize for those who were decent, nor again any punishment for wrongdoers. And then I think men established laws for purposes of punishment, so that justice would be the ruler <one or two words missing> and keep transgression as its slave. And if someone were to do wrong they would be punished. Then, since the laws prevented them from doing violent deeds openly, they continued to do them in secret. I think that then <missing word> some sound and clever-minded man invented fear <of the gods> for mortals, so that evil people would have some fear, even if they were acting or saying or thinking <something> in secret. Thereupon he introduced the divine being, saying: 'There is a divinity, endowed with eternal life, who with his mind hears and sees and understands and attends to these things, bearing a divine nature, who will hear {both} everything that is said amongst mortals, and be able to see everything <that> is done. If ever you plan some evil in silence, you will not escape the notice of the gods in regard to this. For they are able to keep < missing word> in mind.' Speaking these words, he introduced the most pleasant of lessons, concealing the truth with false speaking. He then claimed that the gods lived where he would terrify people the most, if he led them there <?>. He knew the origins of mortals' fears as well as benefits for their wretched life: from the revolving sky above, where they knew there was lightning and there were terrible rumblings of thunder, and the star-faced body of heaven, the beautiful artwork of Time, the clever craftsman. From there the brilliant mass of a star (sun) comes, and the drenching rain travels to earth. Around mortals he set up such fears, through which this man, by his words,

nobly established the divinity in an auspicious spot, and he extinguished lawlessness with laws.
... Thus, I think, someone first persuaded mortals to believe that there is a race of gods.

From its outset, Critias F 19 resonates with ideas that recall Protagoras' social theories. The fragment begins with a description of the disordered and bestial life of humans that accords with but is even bleaker than that in Protagoras' myth of the origins of the polis, as retold by Plato (Pl. *Prot.* 322a-c).

οὕτω δὴ παρεσκευασμένοι κατ' ἀρχὰς **(b.)** ἄνθρωποι ὤκουν σποράδην, πόλεις δὲ οὐκ ἦσαν· ἀπώλλυντο οὖν ὑπὸ τῶν θηρίων διὰ τὸ πανταχῇ αὐτῶν ἀσθενέστεροι εἶναι, καὶ ἡ δημιουργικὴ τέχνη αὐτοῖς πρὸς μὲν τροφήν ἱκανὴ βοηθὸς ἦν, πρὸς δὲ τὸν τῶν θηρίων πόλεμον ἐνδεής—πολιτικὴν γὰρ τέχνην οὐπω εἶχον, ἧς μέρος πολεμική—
(5) ἐζήτουν δὲ ἀθροίζεσθαι καὶ σώζεσθαι κτίζοντες πόλεις· ὅτ' οὖν ἀθροισθεῖεν, ἡδίκουν ἀλλήλους ἅτε οὐκ ἔχοντες τὴν πολιτικὴν τέχνην, ὥστε πάλιν σκεδαννύμενοι διεφθείροντο. **(c.)** Ζεὺς οὖν δείσας περὶ τῷ γένει ἡμῶν μὴ ἀπόλοιτο πᾶν, Ἑρμῆν πέμπει ἄγοντα εἰς ἀνθρώπους αἰδῶ τε καὶ δίκην, ἵν' εἶεν πόλεων κόσμοι τε καὶ δεσμοὶ φιλίας συναγωγοί.

Thus far equipped, men dwelt separately in the beginning, and there were no cities; [322b] so they were being destroyed by the wild beasts, since they were in all ways weaker than they; and although their practical skill was a sufficient aid to acquire food, in their warfare with the beasts it was lacking; for as yet they had no political skill, which includes the art of war. So they sought to join themselves together and preserve their lives by establishing cities. Now as often as they were joined together they did wrong to one another through the lack of political skill, [322c] and thus they began to be scattered again and to perish. So Zeus, fearing that our race would be completely destroyed, sent Hermes to bring Respect and Justice to men, so that there should be orderliness of cities and bonds of friendship to bring them together.

(adapted from W.R.M. Lamb [1967])

In (the Platonic) Protagoras' account the gods are already assumed to exist – an interesting detail from antiquity's most famous agnostic (Prot. B 4 D-K), as is his insistence on ἀσέβεια as a social evil, equated with injustice (Pl. *Prot.* 323e3). But in Protagoras' earliest societies while people have practical skill, they have no civic art or political skill (πολιτικὴ τέχνη: 322b 5) and are therefore subject to violence from each other and from animals; similarly, early human life in F 19 is 'bestial and subject to brute strength' (θηριώδης ἰσχύος θ' ὑπηρέτης: 2).¹⁶ According to Protagoras, as a result of this lack of πολιτικὴ τέχνη, Zeus famously urges Hermes to distribute Aidōs and Dikē to all mortals so that cities may live in harmony and friendship. Protagoras' πολιτικὴ τέχνη has, in effect, the same consequence as the invention of religion does in Critias' fragment in leading to a lawful society and ending the wrongs which people did to each other previously. In Critias F 19 there is no utopian age which is brought to an end by the supposedly pernicious or oppressive invention of religion; it is, rather, an age of brutality that is ended.

¹⁶ Contrast the idyllic life of the Race of Gold, the first in Hesiod's myth of the 'Races', which, except for the Race of Heroes and Demi-gods (156-73), is followed by periods of successive decline (*W&D* 106-201).

For the speaker here in Critias' fragment, justice (δίκη) and laws (νόμοι) are the direct corollary of each other (5-6), an idea couched in one of the many paradoxes of the piece. In calling δίκη a tyrant (τύραννος: 6), the speaker uses loaded language in an almost oxymoronic fashion; the wording makes for a striking juxtaposition. As has been well established, Attic fifth-century literature frequently demonises the figure of the tyrant as an opponent of justice, as a violator of law and purveyor of sexual and other violence or transgression (βία or ὕβρις).¹⁷ But, as is recognized, not all figures labelled 'tyrant' were thereby condemned in Greek thought; Pindar praises this figure also (*Pyth.* 2.18-20; cf. also Arist. *Pol.* 1285 a14-b33).¹⁸ And, in fact, the potentially alarming nuances of τύραννος here are mitigated immediately in the claim that δίκη as tyrant actually would 'keep ὕβρις as its slave'. Justice, here, is a benign 'tyrant'. Already in the opening few lines, then, the speaker of our fragment is using paradoxical terminology and expression consistent with the overall paradoxical nature of the fragment: an atheistic presentation of religion as a benign, indeed, socially valuable, fiction.

So far in our fragment the origins of punitive laws to deal with detectable crimes have been posited, but it is recognition of humans' capacity to commit and contemplate acts of evil in secret that leads to the invention of religion. That human laws still allow transgressors to commit wrongdoing secretly is also recognized by Antiphon (B 44 Fr. A col. 2.3-23 D-K) and Democritus (B 181 D-K). Antiphon in fact goes on to argue for the primacy of φύσις (nature) over νόμος, whereby those who transgress the ordinances of φύσις will suffer even if undetected by other humans (B 44 Fr. A col. 2.3-23 D-K):

[col. 2] τὰ οὖν νόμιμα παραβαίνων, εἰάν λάθῃ τοὺς ὁμολογήσαντας, καὶ αἰσχύνῃς καὶ ζημίας ἀπήλλακται, μὴ λαθῶν δ' οὐ τῶν δὲ τῇ φύσει ξυμφύτων ἕάν τι παρὰ τὸ δυνατόν βιάζῃται, ἕάν τε πάντας ἀνθρώπους λάθῃ, οὐδὲν ἔλαττον κακόν, ἕάν τε πάντες ἴδωσιν, οὐδὲν μείζον· οὐ γὰρ διὰ δόξαν βλάπτεται, ἀλλὰ δι' ἀλήθειαν.

[col. 2] Thus, someone who violates the laws, if he escapes the notice of those who have reached agreement, avoids shame and punishment; but not if he doesn't escape their notice. But if someone tries to violate one of the inherent requirements of nature — which is impossible — and if he escapes all men, the evil is no less; and it is no greater if everybody sees him. For he is harmed not in appearance, but in truth.

Here is a paradoxical link to our fragment: the role of φύσις in Antiphon's thought here is analogous to

¹⁷ For a good analysis of the consistently hostile reception of the tyrant within Attic democratic ideology, see K. Raaflaub (2003). Cf. also O'Sullivan (2005), esp. 129-59 who, in arguing that the satyric ogre Polyphemos in Euripides' *Cyclops* embodies the tropes of a transgressive tyrannical figure, analyses the ancient literature that depicts the tyrant as a figure of greed, (sexual) violence, and contempt for νόμοι.

¹⁸ See also Pindar, *Pyth.* 3.84-6; cf. *Ol.* 1.23, *Pyth.* 1.60, 3.70; Isocrates *Evag.* (esp. 40); *Nicocles* 11-26; Xenophon *Hieron* 8-11. For modern discussions of the tyrant as a repellent and attractive figure in Archaic and Classical Greek thought, see, for instance, McGlew (1993); Luraghi (1994) 354-68; Saïd (1998); Kallet (2003).

the artificially constructed role of the divine in F 19. For the consequences of violating ‘nature’ (for Antiphon) or the divine (according to the rhetoric of our speaker) cannot be avoided; and thus religion, for all of its artificiality, is presented as having the same inescapable properties as nature itself does in Antiphon’s thought. Here Antiphon’s φύσις and Critias’ religion (τὸ θεῖον: 16) are parallel in their perceived potencies.

The description of the inventor of religion as πυκνός τις καὶ σοφὸς γνώμην ἀνήρ (‘some sound and clever-minded man’) is also important. Some may consider the language sardonic or cynical,¹⁹ but such a reading is hardly necessary, and a more straightforward reading of the Greek certainly fits the context. As has been recognised,²⁰ the language here recalls the figure of the ‘first discoverer’, of ‘x invention’ which benefits society. Such a figure was Palamedes in both Old Comedy (Eupolis F 385.6 K-A) and sophistic thought (Gorgias, *Pal.* B11a.30 D-K), whose many inventions of writing, arithmetic, handtools, ways to organize and count the troops, dice games, inter al., benefited the Greeks at Troy. On an even grander scale the Titan Prometheus was likewise a culture hero and human benefactor, claiming that all τέχναι (arts, skills) are traceable to him (*PV* 442-506). If the speaker at F 19 wished to condemn the inventor of religion and law outright, he could have done so much more explicitly, as does Callicles in Plato’s *Gorgias* (483b-c). This famous young hot-head declares that laws were made by the ‘many and weak’ (ἀσθενεῖς ... πολλοί) and inferior (φαιλότεροι) to frighten the stronger (τοὺς ἔρρωμενεστέρους) from having more and sating their desires (cf. also *Gorg.* 491e-492c). Contempt for the framers of laws occurs elsewhere in satyric drama in the words of Euripides’ monstrous Polyphemos, who brutally announces his intention to reject the law of ξενία (hospitality) and instead states his desire to eat Odysseus and his men (*Eur. Cyc.* 338-41):²¹

... οἱ δὲ τοὺς νόμους
 ἔθειντο ποικίλλοντες ἀνθρώπων βίον,
 κλαίειν ἄνωγα· τὴν <δ> ἐμὴν ψυχὴν ἐγὼ (340)
 οὐ παύσομαι δρῶν ἐν, κατεσθίω γὰρ σέ.

Those who have established laws and complicated human life, can go to hell. As for me, I won’t stop short of gratifying [340] my desire by eating you.

Such contempt, however, for the framer of laws and inventor of religion is nowhere evident in F 19.

¹⁹ Collard and Cropp (2008) 675 n. 4 note that Steffen’s translation ‘some (too) shrewdly intelligent ...’ adds a hint of cynicism to the tone of the fragment; but Steffen’s translation distorts the Greek by the insertion of ‘(too)’; the adjectives are not modified by any adverb implying excess.

²⁰ By, for instance, Davies (1989) 21-2; Kearns (2010) 36.

²¹ Links between the ideas of Callicles and Polyphemos have long been noted; see, J. Duchemin (1945) 118 and reiterated often since. But it does not, of course, follow that Polyphemos should be considered a ‘sophistic’ figure because of such connections as many have claimed; for a full rebuttal of this idea, see O’Sullivan (2005) 119-28.

As it is, the description of the inventor of religion in F 19.12 seems closer to Democritus' favourable description of the man who uses language and persuasion to urge people to *areté* (excellence); this figure, says Democritus is κρείσσων or 'superior' to those who use law or compulsion (B181 D-K):

κρείσσων ἐπ' ἀρετὴν φανεῖται προτροπῇ χρώμενος καὶ λόγου πειθοῖ ἢπερ νόμῳ καὶ ἀναγκῇ. λάθρη μὲν γὰρ ἀμαρτέειν εἰκὸς τὸν εἰργμένον ἀδικίης ὑπὸ νόμου, τὸν δὲ ἐς τὸ δέον ἠγμένον πειθοῖ οὐκ εἰκὸς οὔτε λάθρη οὔτε φανερώς ἔρδειν τι πλημμελές. διόπερ συνέσει τε καὶ ἐπιστήμη ὀρθοπραγέων τις ἀνδρείος ἅμα καὶ εὐθύγνωμος γίγνεται.

The man who uses exhortation and persuasion of word rather than law and compulsion will emerge/seem to be a superior (guide) to excellence. For it is likely that the man prevented from injustice by law will commit wrongs in secret, but it is not likely that the one who is led to duty by persuasion will do anything improper either openly or secretly. Because of this someone acting rightly through understanding and knowledge becomes brave and at the same time upright.

As noted earlier, Democritus here recognizes the capacity for secret wrongdoing to continue despite the existence of laws, but also of interest is the description and methods of the man who uses persuasion to lead people to *areté*. This figure who is κρείσσων for Democritus, in using λόγος and πειθῶ to reduce the likelihood of wrongdoing even in secret, provides another parallel with how the 'sound and clever-minded man' of F 19 achieves his ends. For the prevention, or at least reduction, of private wrongdoing in Democritus' view is dependent on λόγος and πειθῶ, and these verbal media play an important role in establishing the efficacy of the divine in F 19; in fact, the role of the λόγος and persuasive powers of the inventor of religion in disseminating his ideas receives frequent mention (23, 25, 26, 28, 38, 41). Especially noteworthy here is the ἐκπληξίς (astonishment, terror, amazement) he induces in his hearers (28), as this quality was associated with such leading orators such as Gorgias (A 4.22 D-K, etc.)²² and Pericles (Thuc. 2.65.9-10):

(9.) ὁπότε γοῦν αἰσθητό τι αὐτοὺς παρὰ καιρὸν ὕβρει θαρσοῦντας, λέγων κατέπλησεν ἐπὶ τὸ φοβείσθαι, καὶ δεδιότας αὐτὸν ἀλόγως ἀντικαθίστη πάλιν ἐπὶ τὸ θαρσεῖν. ἐγίγνετό τε λόγῳ (10.) μὲν δημοκρατία, ἔργῳ δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ πρώτου ἀνδρὸς ἀρχή.

At any rate, when he saw them emboldened with arrogance unduly, he bludgeoned them into a state of terror with his words, and when he saw them irrationally fearful he restored them again to boldness. In word it was democracy, but in fact it was government by the first citizen.

²² The term is of much importance in ancient literary criticism generally, frequently applied also to poets such as Homer (e.g., Pl. *Ion* 535b) and Aeschylus (Ar. *Frogs* 962) and used more widely in later literary criticism [Longinus] 15.2; [Demetrius] *Eloc.* 101, etc. For the association of ἐκπληξίς and Gorgias, see G. Walsh (1984), esp. 89-92; and for a more recent overview of the term's use in ancient literary criticism, see, e.g. D. Russell (1998) 133-4, 154.

Indeed, Thucydides clearly presents this feature of Pericles' rhetoric in favourable terms, as this statement comes in his summation of Pericles' qualities of intelligence, incorruptibility and superiority to his successors. Timaeus (fr. 95 *FHG* I 216; cf. Diod. Sic. 12.53) likewise presents Gorgias' stunning rhetoric favourably, when recounting his compatriot's verbal prowess and impact on his arrival in Athens. The inventor of religion in 'terrifying' his audience thus need not be considered to be guilty of doing his a public a disservice at all.

This impression is confirmed in the description of his teaching as διδαγμάτων ἡδιστον ('most pleasant of lessons'),²³ even if it 'conceals the truth a false logos' (25-6). The lesson, however false, can be readily understood as ἡδιστον since it puts an end to the age of brutality with which the fragment opened and by clear implication ushers in a benign, more civilized era. Comparable here is the social order of Plato's *Republic*, (in)famously predicated on a deliberate falsehood *Rep.* (414b-c) — at least as far as explaining the origins of the ruling classes or philosopher-kings. These figures, like Hesiod's Race of Gold (*WD* 109-20), are supposed to be understood as springing up from the earth, rather than being seen for what they are: products of a socially engineered order controlled by a ruling elite. In regard to disseminating this false idea, Plato refers to γενναῖόν τι ἐν ψευδομένους (literally) 'lying in respect of one noble thing', generally known now as the 'noble lie'.²⁴ Concealing the truth from mortals is elsewhere presented favourably in Classical Greek literature. In the *PV* (248-51) Prometheus tells how, in taking away the foreknowledge of our deaths, he gave us humans 'blind hopes' (τυφλὰς ἐλπίδας), an action which the chorus describe as a 'great benefit' (μέγ' ὠφέλημα) to mortals. On a different level again, Gorgias favourably discusses the idea of deceit when describing the workings of the successful tragic poet and the effects of tragedy on its audience (*Gorg.* B 23 D-K):

ὁ τ' ἀπατήσας δικαιότερος τοῦ μὴ ἀπατήσαντος καὶ ὁ ἀπατηθεὶς σοφώτερος τοῦ μὴ ἀπατηθέντος.

The one who deceives is more just than the one who does not and the one who is deceived is cleverer than the one who is not deceived.

Such a comment may be considered an 'aesthetic pronouncement', but the sophist's paradoxical uniting of justice and wisdom with deceit suggests that ethical and epistemological considerations are not

²³ Cf. Haupt's and Diggle's κύδιστον ('most glorious') which does not undermine my argument even if there were compelling reasons to adopt it; in any event, Sextus' text is defensible. Guthrie (1971) 243 translates it as 'most seductive' and Voelke (2001) 361-2 suggests that speaker is attributing to the speechifying of the inventor of religion the same seductive powers that Gorgias applies to rhetoric generally (§§ *Hel.* 8-14).

²⁴ For the ways in which Plato's 'noble lie' differs from that proffered in *F* 19, see Hesk (2000) 179-88.

entirely absent from his comment.²⁵ Deceit or concealing the truth, then, is not an unequivocal evil in Greek thought, and Aeschylus (F 302 Radt) can say without any hint of blasphemy:

ψευδῶν δὲ καιρὸν ἔσθ' ὅπου τιμᾶ θεός.

But there is a time for (a) god to honour the rightness of a lie.

Our fragment concludes with more favourable language to describe the consequences of the introduction of the divinity (τὸν δαίμονα) to mere mortals such as ourselves (38-9),²⁶ the inventor ‘beautifully’ or ‘finely’ (καλῶς) established the divinity ‘in a suitable spot’ (ἐν πρέποντι χωρίῳ). Here the diminutive χωρίον²⁷ may seem to add a condescending touch to the description of the putative home of these invented deities. But overall the piece has dwelt on the benefits of the inventor of religion and the culminating achievement of ‘some sound and clever-minded man’ who τὴν ἀνομίαν τε τοῖς νόμοις κατέσβεσεν (‘extinguished lawlessness with laws’: 40). The eradication of ἀνομία (lawlessness) would meet with the approval of many Greek thinkers. Hesiod (*Th.* 81-93) and Xenophanes (B 2.13-24 D-K) praise the man who brings harmony and order to his society, as does the speaker in Euripides’ *Autolycus* A F 282 a(nother) satyr play that manages to include a lengthy disquisition on social issues (on the uselessness of athletes and society’s misguided priorities). Interest in social concord or *homonoia* was a sophistic preoccupation,²⁸ and something similar is a chief motivating factor behind the invention of religion in our fragment; the description of the earliest human life before law or religion was ‘disordered and beastlike and subject to brute strength’ (1-2) and laws were invented to reign over ὕβρις. Also relevant here is Antiphon’s (B 61 D-K) denunciation of anarchy: ἀναρχίας δ’ οὐδὲν κάκιον ἀνθρώποις (‘There is nothing worse for people than anarchy.’). And the Anonymus Iamblichi (89.7, 12 D-K) similarly regards lawlessness as the greatest of evils.

(7) ... <ἦ> μὲν εὐνομία ἄριστον εἶη καὶ κοινῇ καὶ ἰδίᾳ, ἡ ἀνομία δὲ κάκιστον·
 <μέγισται γὰρ παραχρῆμα βλάβαι γίνονται ἐκ τῆς ἀνομίας. ... (12) γίνεται δὲ καὶ
 ἡ τυραννίς, κακὸν τοσοῦτόν τε καὶ τοιοῦτον, οὐκ ἔξ ἄλλου τινὸς ἢ ἀνομίας.

²⁵ The bibliography on Gorgianic literary theory is vast, but valuable discussions can be found in Rosenmeyer (1955); Segal (1962); Walsh (1984), 80-106; Buchheim (1989).

²⁶ KPS (1999) 552-61 deleted lines 37-40 on fairly subjective criteria and the deletion has not won general acceptance; Luppe deleted 40.

²⁷ For the implications of this form for determining the genre of the piece, see above.

²⁸ E.g., Antiphon (F 44a-71 D-K); Democritus (B 250 D-K); Gorgias (B 8a D-K); Thrasymachus (B 1.31 D-K); cf. Protagoras (Pl. *Prot.* 322c); Plato (*Rep.* 351d).

(7) *eunomia* (lawfulness/law and order) is the best thing for a community and individual, while *anomia* is the worst; for straightaway the greatest harms result from *anomia* ... (12) Tyranny, too, an evil so huge and terrible comes about from no other cause than *anomia*.

The stated antipathy of these two sophistic writers to lawlessness and anarchy indicates that their own social theories, much like Protagoras' πολιτικὴ τέχνη, tend toward the same ends as are achieved by the invention of religion in F 19.

In sum: claims that 'Critias' F 19 undermines religion along cynical or materialist lines do not do justice to the subtlety of the ideas contained within the fragment. We run the risk of misconstruing it (and so much else besides in our discipline!) if we too readily assimilate the views of F 19 and other ancient texts to the views of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, subjecting them to the distorting glare of that movement; and more recent manifestations of what can be called populist, fundamentalist atheism will only muddy the waters further.²⁹ What I have argued here is that the kind of atheism that underlies our fragment is far better understood within the context of its time and earlier, and that it offers a paradoxically more sophisticated and even tolerant account of the origins of religion, all the while acknowledging its deceptive or even manipulative qualities. Such qualities, as Gorgias (B 23) will tell you, are not fatal to its value, and it is worth considering again Thucydides' unequivocally favourable verdict on Pericles as political leader (2.65.9-10): Pericles is praised not for telling the truth to his citizens, but, inter al., for using the kind of rhetoric that would inculcate the right emotions in the *demos* appropriate for the situation.³⁰ As we saw, one of these was ἐκπληξις, an emotion likewise elicited by the inventor of religion (F 19.28).

Despite its atheistic import, much of Critias F 19 comprises a more nuanced contemplation on the social origins of religion whose aims are consistently aligned with a number of contemporary ethical and political goals, not least the eradication of lawlessness and hubris. While its contents could be seen as dangerous to conventional religious beliefs in presenting traditional polytheism as a fiction, it is important to bear in mind that such a fiction is presented from the point of view of its inventor. At no point are we told that the inventor of this belief gains in power or prestige himself.³¹ Rather, we are reminded of the goals of this newly fabricated polytheism: to strengthen law and punish wrongdoers (4,

²⁹ Cf. the straw-man arguments of Richard Dawkins or the *ad hominem* ranting of Christopher Hitchens — fervent preachers of what has been termed 'New Atheism' who deservedly incur the censures of even other atheists (see, for instance, 'Beyond Belief' *The Sunday Age*, Melbourne, January 10, 2010, p. 13) — which will take us yet further away from understanding the paradoxes and challenges of documents like Critias F 19.

³⁰ Thucydides implies that Periclean rhetoric actually distracts the *demos* from the realities confronting them (2.65.1), including the fact that they live not under democracy, but government by the first citizen (2.65.10); for discussion, see Walsh (1984) 92-4.

14, 22-4), end disorder and violence (2-3), eradicate lawlessness (40), and extend the work of νόμοι in suppressing hubris and promoting justice (6-7). Just as the perpetrators of Plato's 'noble lie' see their fiction in benign terms, so too our fragment, in positing the origins of religion from the point of view of its inventor, can present it in paradoxically favourable terms by focusing on its pragmatic benefits which parallel much advanced ethical and social theorizing of its day.

Our fragment, then, deftly reworks earlier poetic and philosophical thought of, for instance, Hesiod and Xenophanes, while incorporating contemporaneous sophistic and political speculation — from Protagoras and Democritus to Antiphon and the Anonymus Iamblichi, among others. When seen in its cultural context, our fragment demonstrates that an avowedly atheistic stance need not be reducible to an anti-religious one. Comparable here also is Prodicus' atheistic view (B 5 D-K) which posits the social invention of religion as based in gratitude for the benefits provided by natural phenomena such as the Nile in Egypt; nothing suggests that the sophist is hostile to religion per se.³² As a document that might be labeled an example of 'Old Atheism', our fragment gives us much to ponder in its rich and ambivalent take on religion. Initiates of 'New Atheism' might be more at home in the company of a Callicles.³³

³¹ Cf. the objections of Frazer and Ackerman to religion, noted above, which have no bearing on our fragment.

³² Instead, it is far more reasonable to take Prodicus' view as an attempt to establish the cultural origins of religious beliefs; for discussion, see, e.g. Guthrie (1971) 238-42; cf. also N. Dunbar (1995) on *Ar. Av.* 691-2. As de Romilly (1992) 194 notes, 'there is nothing to suggest that Prodicus rejected religious practice, just because he had an explanation for it.'

³³ I am grateful to the anonymous referee, Kurt Raaflaub, Deborah Boedeker, David Phillips and particularly Neil O'Sullivan for comments on an earlier version of this paper.

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