“Thrice-Male…Thrice-Powerful”: Gender and Authority in *Apocryphon of John*

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Abstract

The following paper examines *Apocryphon of John* through two different analytic frameworks that make this complex and at times, seemingly bizarre 2nd century C.E. Egyptian text intelligible: (Middle) Platonism and gender. First, the text is analyzed in continuity with the ideological content and rhetorical strategies of contemporary Middle Platonic literature. Next, the text is analyzed as a gendered piece of literature, with attention paid to the rhetorical usefulness of gender in deploying motifs of femininity, masculinity, and androgyny in *Apocryphon of John* and other contemporary literature. Each mode of analysis shows how *Apocryphon of John* sets up an oppositional narrative framework that promotes a valuation of two competing social hierarchies and systems of authority, with one positioned as inherently and irrevocably superior to the other. The comparative work of the paper that focuses on *Apocryphon of John’s* integration of contemporary philosophical and gendered ideologies and rhetorical strategies mediates early approaches to Nag Hammadi literature, and more broadly, so-called gnostic literature, that on the one hand, analyze these texts primarily if not exclusively within the ideological framework of (heretical) Christianity, and on the other hand, see women’s liberation behind the feminine imagery included in the texts.
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1. Introduction

Since the modern acquisition of manuscripts of *Apocryphon of John*, first in 1896 when German scholar Carl Reinhardt took a manuscript of the text back from Egypt to Berlin and later in 1945 when three separate manuscripts of the text included in the Nag Hammadi library were found, this text has been a part of the academic construction of the history of early Christianity. *Apocryphon of John* was initially composed in Greek, most likely in a pluralistic, urban 2nd century C.E. scholastic setting.¹ Our earliest evidence for the text exists in Irenaeus’ *Against the Heresies*, a text written in Rome around 180 C.E., in which a similar narrative to that of *Apocryphon of John*’s cosmogony is used as a means of refuting alternative ideological narratives and claims to truth.² The four manuscript copies of *Apocryphon of John* currently extant represent three independent Coptic translations of Greek versions of this text: Codex Berolinensis Gnosticus (BG) 8505 (acquired by Reinhardt) found near Achmim, Egypt, and Nag Hammadi Codices (NHC) III, II, and IV (with NHC IV nearly identical to NHC II though badly damaged) buried in the late 4th or 5th century C.E. near a Pachomian monastery.³ In 1995, Michael Waldstein and Frederik Wisse published a synoptic version of the four manuscripts that includes the Coptic text, English translations of the manuscripts, and cross-references to the text in Irenaeus.⁴

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¹ Karen L. King, *The Secret Revelation of John* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 10-17. King hypothesizes that *Apocryphon of John* was composed in Alexandria, Egypt, and advances a convincing argument to this end.
It was with the procurement of ancient manuscripts such as these from Egypt and the ancient Near East from the 18th century and forward that scholars started to take into account more than the literary evidence that later came to define orthodoxy. *Apocryphon of John* in particular has been considered a paradigmatic example of gnosticism, an anachronistic label\(^5\) that works to classify certain ancient texts, ideological systems, and communities as heretically Christian. As Karen King points out in her treatment of *Apocryphon of John*\(^6\) and gnosticism more broadly,\(^7\) this conventional classification is related to the construction of orthodoxy and heresy in modern scholarship and is suspect for this reason. More importantly for the purpose of analyzing this text, restricting our analytic framework to ancient (heretical) Christianity is also analytically limiting. As King explains, the Nag Hammadi library is much more diverse than the classification of gnosticism allows, including ideological content that might not conventionally be classified as gnostic or Christian as well as a broad range of literary genres such as philosophy (e.g., a fragment of Plato’s *Republic*), “wisdom literature, revelations, gospels, letters, prayers, and ritual texts.”\(^8\)

Underlying my analysis of *Apocryphon of John* is a curiosity about how alternative ways of reading such texts might lead to analyses that avoid such hegemonic scholarly

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\(^6\) Karen L. King, *The Secret Revelation of John*.

\(^7\) Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?*

constructions and suggest new and interesting ways of looking at this text. To explore this question as it relates to *Apocryphon of John*, I examine this text in continuity with its non-Christian contemporaries, most prominently considering the text as a piece of Middle Platonic literature. The second chapter is devoted to this comparative project. In the third chapter, I then turn my attention to analyzing *Apocryphon of John* as a gendered piece of literature, focusing specifically on the *rhetorical* usefulness of gender. In both cases, I centre my analysis on *Apocryphon of John*’s oppositional narrative framework, suggesting that the Platonic and gendered material works to promote a valuation of two competing social hierarchies and systems of authority, with one positioned as inherently and irrevocably superior to the other.

Both frameworks of analysis are deployed to elucidate *Apocryphon of John*’s nuanced ideological content and interpretive strategies in a way that is more complete and persuasive than an analysis of the text as gnostic could be. While this project focuses exclusively on the productivity of this methodological framework in making sense of *Apocryphon of John*, its implications are potentially broader. Specifically, this study further suggests the usefulness of comparative study of other texts that play key roles in the construction of early Christianity, including those classified as more orthodox than *Apocryphon of John*, within ideological frameworks beyond that which is retrospectively considered as Christian.
2. *Apocryphon of John* and Platonism

At first glance, *Apocryphon of John* is a somewhat baffling read. The text combines figures and features from a host of ideological and cultural traditions, and its narrative logic assumes a common knowledge of these ancient traditions. The narrative framework of the text as a revelation or teaching received by John, passed on to his followers or students, and recorded as the *Apocryphon of John* itself points to a primary discursive framework within which *Apocryphon of John* is made comprehensible: philosophy, and specifically, the Middle Platonic tradition. In this chapter, I establish *Apocryphon of John*’s continuity with Middle Platonic literature to ground this text in one stream of its ideological source material and provide an intellectual context that makes sense of *Apocryphon of John*’s content.

Although a survey of Plato’s writings and doctrines that might in any way be considered comprehensive is beyond the scope of this analysis, it is helpful to outline those features of Platonic ideology that figure prominently in and are mediated through various writings by so-called Middle Platonists from 80 B.C.E. to 220 C.E. One such literary production, of course, is the *Apocryphon of John*. Plato’s *Timaeus* is particularly useful in focusing attention on those motifs and concepts relevant to the *Apocryphon of John* (as I show below). For this reason, my explanation of Platonic ideology centres on this text.

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As Dillon demonstrates, Plato’s dialogues firmly establish the existence of two opposed first principles: the One and the indefinite dyad. He summarizes these principles as follows:

The One is an active principle, imposing “limit” (peras) on the formlessness (apeiron) of the opposite principle. The Dyad is regarded as a duality…as being infinitely extensible or divisible, being simultaneously infinitely large and infinitely small. … The Unlimited Dyad is primarily the basic unlimitedness or otherness on which The One acts, but it is also the irrational aspect of the Soul, and again the substrate of the physical world, the Receptacle of the Timaeus. … By acting upon the Dyad, “limiting” it, The One generates the Idea-Numbers.  

Dillon describes evidence for the process by which the One generates these Idea-numbers as somewhat confused and ambiguous in his examination of both the Platonic dialogues and secondary citations of Plato’s doctrine (predominantly in writings by Aristotle), but nonetheless suggests that it seems Plato came to view the Ideas as “numbers, or mathematical entities of some sort,”12 with the primal numbers (one, two, three, and four) being both inherent in the One and also acting to limit the Dyad to produce all subsequent combinations of Idea-numbers.13 This mathematical scheme is how Plato “[provides] the link between the absolute unity of the One and the three-dimensional physical multiplicity around us.”14 Roughly, Plato envisaged the first four primal numbers as each having a geometrical aspect (point, line, plane, and solid, respectively) that are combined in and projected upon matter by the world soul (described in Tim. 35a-c and functioning as a macrocosm for the human soul) “in the form of combinations of basic triangles, to form the four elements, Fire, Air, Water, and Earth.”15 The soul is thus the central mediating entity between the intelligible and physical realms characterizing Plato’s

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11 Dillon, The Middle Platonists, 3-4.  
12 Dillon, The Middle Platonists, 4.  
13 Dillon, The Middle Platonists, 4-5  
14 Dillon, The Middle Platonists, 5.  
15 Dillon, The Middle Platonists, 5.
dualistic cosmology. As Dillon explains, this process by which the soul receives, transforms, and passes on influences from the intelligible realm to create the physical realm is the process described and mythologized in *Timaeus*.\(^{16}\)

In this text, Timaeus provides an elaborate telling of the creation of the universe, focusing especially on how to account for the cosmos’ beauty and order. To do so, Timaeus proposes that the world is the product of a benevolent demiurge-god who creates the world in imitation of perfect divine intellect. Timaeus begins his account of the cosmos’ creation by outlining a fundamental distinction between Being and Becoming: “If first of all we must, in my judgement, make the following distinction. What is that which is Existent always and has no Becoming \([\gamma\epsilon\nu\epsilon\sigma\iota\upsilon \delta\varepsilon \\upsilon \omicron \kappa \epsilon\xi\omicron \upsilon]?\) And what is that which is Becoming always and never is Existent \([\gamma\iota\gamma\nu\nu\omicron\omicron\epsilon\nu\omicron \mu\varepsilon\nu \acute{\alpha}\epsilon\iota]\)?” (*Tim. 27d*-28a [Bury, LCL]).\(^{17}\) In this construction, Being is uniform, eternal, unchanging, and “apprehensible by thought with the aid of reasoning \([\nu\omicron\iota\eta\omicron \sigma\varepsilon\iota \mu\varepsilon \tau\acute{\alpha} \lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\omicron]\)” (*Tim. 28a [Bury, LCL]). By contrast, Becoming is perishable and an “object of opinion \([\delta\omicron\acute{\epsilon}\zeta]\) with the aid of unreasoning sensation \([\alpha\omicron\iota\sigma\theta\eta\sigma\epsilon\omicron\omega\varsigma \acute{\alpha}\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron \delta\omicron\chi\sigma\sigma\omicron\tau\omicron\varsigma]\)” (*Tim. 28a [Bury, LCL]). The distinction between Being and Becoming underlies the Platonic dualism mentioned above; Being refers to the divine realm of Ideas and Becoming is constituted by the mundane, physical, sensory world.

As King points out, while Timaeus’ cosmological scheme is fundamentally dualistic, Timaeus assumes a continuity between the realms of Being and Becoming and


\(^{17}\) In this and in subsequent translations of Greek texts, the Greek text of key terms and phrases is provided in brackets (in longer translations) or parentheses (in paraphrased translations). In cases where I disagree with translations from the LCL series, I provide my own translations in brackets.
a great deal of attention is focused on navigating the relationship between these two realms on both ontological and epistemological grounds. As Timaeus states, “everything which becomes [i.e., that which constitutes the realm of Becoming] must of necessity become owing to some Cause” (Tim 28a [Bury, LCL]), and this cause can be determined through rational contemplation of the character of the sensible world. Timaeus explains the logic underlying the determination of the cause of the physical world:

> [W]hen the artificer [δημιουργός] of any object, in forming its shape and quality, keeps his gaze fixed on that which is uniform [i.e., Being], using a model of this kind, that object, executed in this way, must of necessity be beautiful; but whenever he gazes at that which has come into existence and uses a created model, the object thus executed is not beautiful. (Tim. 28a-b [Bury, LCL])

According to this logic, because the world is beautiful and the artificer (δημιουργός) is good, the model for the cosmos must be found in the eternal, divine, intelligible realm; to suggest otherwise would be impious (Tim. 29a, 68e-69a). The mundane world is therefore a copy of divine reality and the Ideas contained within this eternal realm, patterned upon such perfection by a benevolent creator god who desires to make the best possible world.

But while this pattern is apparent in the goodness and beauty of the cosmos, the sensible world remains only a copy of the model and, according to Plato’s conceptualization of generation (and mimesis) as a process of degeneration, as such, is inherently inferior both ontologically and epistemologically. King shows how Timaeus connects ontology and epistemology in her explanation that knowledge of the mundane world, the world known through sense perception, “can be the subject only of opinion because the material world is mutable and constantly in flux (Tim. 27d-28a)”\(^\text{18}\) while the divine world and the Ideas it contains constitute the “sure and stable basis for knowledge

of everything that exists”¹⁹ and are therefore the only site of true knowledge; Plato summarizes as much in his stating “as Being is to Becoming, so is Truth to Belief [ὁ τί περ πρὸς γένεσιν οὐσία, τοῦτο πρὸς πίστιν ἀληθεία]” (Tim. 29c [Bury, LCL]).

Timaeus further explains this discrepancy between Being and Becoming, the divine and sensory realms, with reference to a third ontological principle: the receptacle. The receptacle in Timaeus seems to correspond roughly to the indefinite dyad or world soul or at least seems to be the material substrate or space in which the world soul acts. She is described as the “receptacle, and as it were the nurse, of all Becoming” (Tim. 49a [Bury, LCL]), devoid herself of any shape or form (Tim. 50), and the “moulding-stuff for everything” (Tim. 50c [Bury, LCL]) through which all the copies of the Ideas/eternal enter, are mediated, and depart. Timaeus goes on to describe this tripartite division of Being as a family:

For the present, then, we must conceive of three kinds—the Becoming, that “Wherein” it becomes, and the source “Wherefrom” the Becoming is copied and produced. Moreover, it is proper to liken the Recipient to the Mother [μητρί], the Source to the Father [πατρί], and what is engendered between these two to the Offspring [φυσιν ἐκγόνω]. (Tim. 50d [Bury, LCL])

The above passage makes mention of a particularly notable elaboration of Platonic ideology in Timaeus: the cause, father, or demiurge. As King summarizes, the demiurge is described by Timaeus as “God, the father and creator of the world, the unitary principle (the One or Monad), and the cause underlying all existence.”²⁰ The demiurge is the anthropomorphized intellect (νοῦς)²¹ responsible for the creation of both the psychical

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²⁰ King, *The Secret Revelation of John*, 191. On Plato’s god’s oneness, and especially on how multiplicity can be generated from this primal unity, see Parm. 137c-142a.
and physical dimensions of the world soul and the cosmos as a whole. Regarding the comparative effort between Platonic ideology and the Apocryphon of John, noting that the demiurge is unfalteringly benevolent in his construction of the world and all those aspects by which the cosmos is constituted is especially important.\(^{22}\) God brings order out of chaos and because he desires creation to resemble the divine as closely as possible, models the cosmos on the pattern of the divine intellect, endowing the universe with both reason and soul. In Timaeus’ anthropogenic account, God employs a legion of younger gods to create mortal humans in imitation of his own creative power. In so doing, he deliberately ensures humans are constructed as lesser than gods, but the demiurge also endows all humans with soul and reason. Further, the corporeal design of humans conducted by the younger gods and described in great detail by Timaeus is patterned on that of the cosmos and is designed to help humans apprehend their divine reason and eventually, if they have lived just lives, return to their proper divine loci. As Donald Zeyl notes, the creation account of Timaeus is teleological in the sense that both the cosmos as a whole and its various parts are designed to be the best possible reflection of the intellect as well as “the model for rational souls to understand and to emulate [because] [s]uch understanding and emulation restores those souls to their original state of excellence, a state that was lost in their embodiment.”\(^{23}\)

Timaeus is undeniably (and occasionally self-consciously) vague in articulating the intricacies of particular concepts contained in his narrative, and the text leaves a number of questions and problems to be addressed by later Platonists. In the introduction to his

\(^{22}\) Indeed, Plato theorizes the form of the Good in very similar terms in Republic VI 506e-511e.

\(^{23}\) Zeyl, “Plato’s Timaeus,” 1.
detailed examination of Middle Platonism, John Dillon outlines the later development of various ideas from *Timaeus* concerning the relationship between time and cosmogony, the identities of the demiurge and the younger gods, the receptacle’s activities, and the relationship between the immaterial Ideas and their physical manifestations. Dillon’s nuanced analysis of Middle Platonism is valuable in providing a picture of how Platonic ideologies developed and appeared in the 1st to 3rd centuries C.E. The rest of this chapter focuses attention on four developments in Platonism that are key to understanding *Apocryphon of John*. My analysis of primary sources focuses on texts attributed to Plutarch, Philo, and to a slightly lesser extent, Numenius for their comparative usefulness in sorting out how *Apocryphon of John* plays with Platonic ideology in ways entirely typical of Middle Platonists. As King outlines, the developments most relevant to *Apocryphon of John* concern “the problem of ultimate cause; the relationship of the demiurge to the Ideas; the problem of evil; and the creation of humanity.”

The problem of causality arises as an effect of Timaeus’ argument that everything must have a cause: “Again, everything which becomes must of necessity become owing to some Cause; for without a cause it is impossible for anything to attain becoming” (*Tim* 28a [Bury, LCL]). This kind of logic can lead to an infinite regression of determining the cause of every cause. As both King and Dillon point out, one way later Platonists deal with this problem is by elevating a single, unified entity to transcend even the realm of Being. King cites the following passage from Plato’s *Parmenides* describing how multiplicity comes from unity as a reference or foundation for this Middle Platonic move:

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Then the one is not at all. … Then it has no being even so as to be one, for if it were one, it would be and would partake of being; but apparently one neither is nor is one, if this argument is to be trusted. … But can that which does not exist have anything pertaining or belonging to it? … Then the one has no name, nor is there any description or knowledge or perception or opinion of it. … And it is neither named nor described nor thought of nor known, nor does any existing thing perceive it. (Parm. 141e-142a [Fowler, LCL])

Ammonius’ musings on the relationship of God and cosmogony to time in Plutarch’s The E at Delphi provides a useful example of how this transcendence appears in Middle Platonic discourses:

But God is (if there be need to say so), and He exists for no fixed time, but for the everlasting ages which are immovable, timeless, and undeviating, in which there is no earlier nor later, no future nor past, no older nor younger; but He, being One, has with only one ‘Now’ completely filled ‘For ever’; and only when Being is after His pattern is it in reality Being, not having been nor about to be, nor has it had a beginning nor is it destined to come to an end. … In fact the Deity is not Many. … But Being must have Unity, even as Unity must have Being. Now divergence from Unity, because of its differing from Being, deviates into the creation of that which has no Being. (De E. 393a-c [Babbitt, LCL])

This transcendent characterization of the First Principle, One, Monad, or God in Middle Platonic literature is also elaborated by later Platonists with the use of negative or apophatic theology. Again, in Plutarch’s The E at Delphi, God/Being is described as “eternal, without beginning and without end” (De E. 392e [Babbitt, LCL]), unchanging (De E. 392e [Babbitt, LCL]), non-composite (De E. 393b [Babbitt, LCL]), and uncontaminated (De E. 393c [Babbitt, LCL]).

So, too, does Philo present a totally transcendent deity in his writings. Philo’s god is eternal (“The Deity is and has been from eternity” [Op. 170 {Colson and Whitaker, LCL}]), imperishable, unchanging, unnameable (Somn. I.67 [Colson and Whitaker, LCL]), unutterable (Somn. I.67 [Colson

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27 Dillon suggests that the fact that Plutarch’s subject here is Apollo is indicative of how traditional gods “had become aspects of the godhead” for philosophers like Plutarch (Dillon, The Middle Platonists, 199).

28 Dillon, The Middle Platonists, 155.

29 Dillon, The Middle Platonists, 155.
and Whitaker, LCL]), incomprehensible (Somn. I.67 [Colson and Whitaker, LCL]), unified (Op. 170-171 [Colson and Whitaker, LCL]), and sui generis (“ever One, abiding, without motion, Himself (alone) like unto Himself, different from all others” [Op. 100 {Colson and Whitaker, LCL}]).

The elevation of the first principle to a transcendent figure necessitates certain reconsiderations of the character of the demiurge. Specifically, we frequently see in later Platonic conceptualizations a splitting apart of Plato’s god as first principle/cause and maker. As King aptly points out, the need to split apart the Platonic god arises in part as an effect of Plato’s obscurity about the relationship between the demiurge and the Ideas of the divine, intelligible realm. As King explains, in Timaeus the Ideas exist apart from the demiurge and are used by this entity as models for creation. If the assumption that the demiurge is good and therefore looks to the Ideas as the best paradigm for creation is held to, then the problem arises of how to account for the evil and disorder so readily apparent in the corporeal world. In this way, considerations of the identity and activities of the demiurge are tied to both the question of how utterly transcendent Ideas (i.e., Being) are translated through and into matter in the creation of the corporeal world (i.e., Becoming) and how disorder can be accounted for in a world designed to reflect divine perfection.

Plato offers two kinds of solutions to these issues, both of which underlie and are developed in later Platonic literature. First, Plato assumes and argues for the inherent inferiority of creation as compared to the divine realm. As a copy is inferior to its model, truth inferior to opinion, and the body inferior to the soul, so, too, is the corporeal realm

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inferior to the divine realm. Second, as noted earlier in this chapter, Plato proposes the receptacle to explain differentiation and disorder.

Dillon suggests that later Platonists incorporate the Stoic Logos figure as the active, demiurgic entity, “and when they reinstated a transcendent immaterial First Principle…they arrived at two entities, one basically the demiurge of *Timaeus*, the other the Good of the *Republic* and the One of the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides*.31 Numenius is particularly clear in outlining this division of Plato’s god and demotion of the demiurge:

The First God, existing in his own place, is simple and, consorting as he does with himself alone, can never be divisible. The Second and Third God, however, are in fact one; but in the process of coming into contact with Matter, which is the Dyad, He gives unity to it, but is Himself divided by it, since Matter has a character prone to desire and is in flux. So in virtue of not being in contact with the Intelligible (which would mean being turned in upon Himself), by reason of looking towards Matter and taking thought for it, He becomes unregarding (*aperioptos*) of Himself. And He seizes upon the sense realm and ministers to it and yet draws it up to His own character, as a result of this yearning towards Matter. (Fragment II in Dillon, 367-368)

Here Numenius hypothesizes three gods. The first god refers to the primal cause, “the Good, the One, the Father, and the King.”32 The second god is the demoted demiurge who functions as world creator by contemplating the forms and desiring to impose them on matter. The third god arises from the splitting apart of the demiurge by the effect of matter (which “divides whatever has anything to do with it”33). George Karamanolis describes this god as a third intellect that thinks in a discursive way to impose Forms on

matter and equates it with Plato’s world soul. Karamanolis helpfully summarizes Numenius’ three gods:

Numenius’ three gods are the principles of being (first God) and generation (second and third god; fr. 16), and thus of everything that exists. … Numenius advanced the idea that goodness is transmitted from the highest God through the second, demiurgic intellect, which realizes creation through a third intellect, to the world without God actually doing anything (fr. 14.6-14).  

In Numenius’ cosmic scheme, the first principle/Ideas are the cause only of goodness and order, while matter is the cause of disorder. As Karamanolis argues, Numenius identifies matter with Plato’s indefinite dyad and the receptacle of Timaeus (which Karamanolis suggests is in line with Numenius’ contemporaries like Aristotle) and equates matter’s lack of form with a lack of reason. For Numenius, lack of reason is associated with disorder; it is this logic that underlies his hypothesizing of matter as the cause of disorder in the sensible world. In this construction, Numenius relies on the same metaphysical hierarchy underlying the Timaeus that orders the sensible world below the intelligible and the intelligible world below the divine first principle.

In Philo’s works, we can see another division of God’s functions into distinct entities. Specifically, Philo proposes a separation between God and his Logos. Dillon describes Philo’s adopting a “Stoicized version” of Plato’s account of the relationship between God—who is entirely transcendent in Philo’s work—and the created world, dividing the world in two between an active causal principle and a passive element and equating the causal principle with the mind of the universe or Logos.  

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34 Karamanolis, “Numenius,” 17.
35 Dillon, The Middle Platonists, 45-46.
“active element of God’s creative thought.”\textsuperscript{36} As Philo outlines in the following passage, Logos is the location of the Ideas and thus constitutes the intelligible world:

As, then, the city which was fashioned beforehand within the mind of the architect held no place in the outer world, but had been engraved in the soul of the artificer as by a seal; even so the universe that consisted of ideas would have no other location than the Divine Reason [θεῖου λόγου], which was the Author of this ordered frame. (\textit{Op.} 20 [Colson and Whitaker, LCL])

In Philo’s double creation narrative, the intelligible world is God’s first creation, and the Ideas become models for the secondarily created physical world through the influence of Logos. As Dillon summarizes, Logos is variously described by Philo as a divider, the instrument (ἀργανοῦ) of God in creation, and the archetypical image (εἰκόν) of God that is then the paradigm for all other creation.\textsuperscript{37} Logos is also sometimes equated with Philo’s feminine life-principle, Sophia.

Plutarch similarly establishes Logos as an intermediary between his transcendent god and the sensible world. Dillon\textsuperscript{38} refers to the following passage from \textit{On Isis and Osiris} to illustrate the transcendent and immanent aspects of the divine Logos:

For that which really \textit{is} and is perceptible and good is superior to destruction and change. The images from it with which the sensible and corporeal world is impressed, the relations, forms, and likenesses which this takes upon itself, like impressions of seals in wax, are not permanently lasting, but disorder and disturbance overtakes them, being driven hither from the upper reaches, and fighting against Horus, whom Isis brings forth, beholden of all, as the image of the perceptible world. (\textit{De Iside.} 373a-b [Babbitt, LCL])

Here the transcendent Logos, which is constituted by the Ideas and Being as in Philo, is likened to Osiris’ eternal soul while the immanent Logos, the manifestation of the Ideas in matter, is akin to Osiris’ body, which is periodically destroyed by Typhon (to be reassembled by Isis). The active principle in Plutarch’s scheme is thus divided in two.

\textsuperscript{36} Dillon, \textit{The Middle Platonists}, 159.
\textsuperscript{37} Dillon, \textit{The Middle Platonists}, 160-161.
\textsuperscript{38} Dillon, \textit{The Middle Platonists}, 200.
Both Philo and Plutarch also make reference to a feminine creative figure in their work. Philo’s concept of Sophia is, as Dillon suggests, somewhat vague but worth taking note of for this entity’s appearance in both Plutarch’s writings and the Apocryphon of John. Her equation with Logos, as noted above, is common, but she also serves other roles in Philo’s cosmic scheme. In some cases, she is described similarly to the receptacle of Plato’s Timaeus as “foster-mother,” “nurse,” and “the Mother of all things in the Universe,” and functions as a creative agent of God. In other cases, she is the mother of Logos itself. The following passage from On Drunkenness characterizes Sophia as creator, divine knowledge, and mother of Logos:

Now “father and mother” \([\pi\alpha\tau\rho\omicron\varsigma \delta\varepsilon \kappa\omicron \mu\pi\tau\rho\omicron\varsigma]\) is a phrase which can bear different meanings. For instance we should rightly say and without further question that the Architect \([\delta\eta\mu\omicron\upsilon\omicron\gamma\omicron\nu]\) who made this universe was at the same time the father of what was thus born, whilst its mother was the knowledge \([\epsilon\pi\iota\sigma\tau\eta\omicron\mu\nu]\) possessed by its Maker. With His knowledge God had union, not as men have it, and begat created being. And knowledge, having received the divine seed \([\sigma\pi\acute{e}\rho\acute{r}m\acute{a}\tau\alpha]\), when her travail was consummated bore the only beloved son who is apprehended by the senses, the world which we see. Thus in the pages of one of the inspired company, wisdom \([\sigma\omega\phi\acute{i}\alpha]\) is represented as speaking of herself after this manner: “God obtained me first of all his works and founded me before the ages” (Prov. viii. 22). True, for it was necessary that all that came to the birth of creation should be younger than the mother and nurse of [everything]. (Ebr. 30-31 [Colson and Whitaker, LCL])

The feminine generative entity in Plutarch’s work is Isis. She is characterized similarly to Philo’s Sophia in being equated with Timaeus’ receptacle and functioning both as a recipient and generator of creation. Plutarch details Isis’ role in his text On Isis and Osiris:

Isis is, in fact, the female \([\theta\eta\lambda\nu]\) principle of Nature, and is receptive of every form of generation, in accord with which she is called by Plato the gentle nurse and the all-receptive, and by most people has been called by countless names, since, because of the force of Reason \([\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\upsilon]\), she turns herself to this thing or that and is receptive of all manner of shapes and forms. She has an innate love for the first and

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39 Det. 115-116 (Dillon, The Middle Platonists, 164).
most dominant of all things, which is identical with the good [ὅ τὰ γαθεὶς], and this she yearns for and pursues; but the portion which comes from evil [κακοῦ] she tries to avoid and to reject, for she serves them both as a place and means of growth, but inclines always towards the better and offers to it opportunity to create from her and impregnate her with effluxes and likenesses in which she rejoices and is glad that she is made pregnant and teeming with these creations. For creation is the image [ἐικών] of being in matter, and the thing created is a picture [μίμημα] of reality. (De Iside 372e-f [Babbitt, LCL])

Dillon notes that in the cases of both Plutarch’s Isis and Philo’s Sophia, this feminine entity is associated with the positive aspect of matter (with positive here referencing activity and agency), somewhat or somehow alienated from the intelligible realm while also desirous of imposing this realm’s order, influential in the creation of the sensible world, and an intermediary between the transcendent god and the corporeal, human world.⁴⁰

Philo further elaborates his theological scheme by proposing a system of powers (δύναμεῖς)—the creative, regal, merciful, legislative, and forbidding—which Dillon seems to suggest are both ruled by Logos and are indistinguishable from the Ideas in constituting Logos.⁴¹ Further, it is by virtue of this creative power (ποιητική δύναμις) that God—specifically, an entity of God described by Philo as goodness (ἀγαθός)—creates the intelligible realm and by virtue of the regal power (βασιλική δύναμις) that the entity of God called sovereignty (ἐξουσία) creates and rules the sublunar, corporeal world. Dillon notes that Philo places the creative power higher than the regal power on the scale of perfection, but does so in terms of these powers’ particular functions—as pertaining to the intelligible and sublunar realms, respectively—rather than their

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⁴⁰ Dillon, The Middle Platonists, 204.
⁴¹ Dillon, The Middle Platonists, 164-165.
ontological status. Dillon also describes how Philo’s system of individual human piety reflects this hierarchy:

The most gifted will ascend all the way to a vision of God himself; others, however, will only attain to a knowledge of the Creative Power, being inspired by love for God as creator of the world; others again will rise no further than knowledge of the Regal Power, and are held to their duties simply by fear of punishment.\(^{42}\)

While Philo constructs the sublunar regal power as an aspect of God, the idea that our world is ruled by a distinct entity functioning as “an agent or as a rival of the Supreme Deity,”\(^{43}\) as Dillon puts it, is not unique to Philo in Middle Platonic conversations. Indeed, we see another such figure in both Plutarch’s writings (which will be noted in the forthcoming discussion of Plutarch’s account of evil) and in *Apocryphon of John*.

Philo adheres to this same division of rational and irrational in his discussion of human psychophysical ontology and creation. He proposes that humans possess two souls, or perhaps two parts of one soul, one of which is rational, immortal, and created by God and the other of which is irrational, mortal, and created by God’s helpers (*Fug*. 67; also as in *Tim*. 41e). Philo expounds this double creation of humans in *On the Creation of the World* in which he comments on Genesis 2:7, as cited by Dillon:\(^{44}\)

After this he says that “God formed man by taking clay from the earth, and breathed into his face the breath of life” (Gen. ii. 7). By this also he shows very clearly that there is a vast difference between the man thus formed and the man that came into existence earlier after the image of God: for the man so formed is an object of sense-perception, partaking already of such or such quality, consisting of body and soul, man or woman, by nature mortal; while he that was after the (Divine) image was an idea or type or seal, an object of thought (only), incorporeal, neither male or female [ουτε άρσεν ουτε θηλυ], by nature incorruptible. (*Op.* 134)

Plutarch conceives of a threefold division of individual humans—intellect, soul, and body—as a microcosm of his metaphysical scheme. As Karamanolis explains, both

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\(^{42}\) Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 169.  
\(^{43}\) Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 170.  
\(^{44}\) Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 176
the human soul and the world soul function as intermediaries: between body and intellect in the case of the human soul, and between the creator god/divine intellect and creation in the case of the latter.\(^45\) The hierarchical ordering of intellect over soul and soul over body underlies Plutarch’s construction of both the individual and world soul. Indeed, Plutarch even envisages two kinds of death for individual humans: “first when intellect leaves soul and body, second when soul leaves body (De facie 943a-b).”\(^46\) Further, this separation of intellect from soul and body is the goal of intellect and is how humans most completely imitate the divine.\(^47\) This logic relies on the fundamental dualism (between rationality and non-rationality) underlying Middle Platonic conversations and repeatedly emphasized in this section of my analysis.

This dualism comes to the forefront in both Plutarch’s and Philo’s accounts of disorder and evil. For Plutarch, on the level of individuals, the source of disorderly conduct is located in the non-rational part of humans. On a cosmic level, Plutarch hypothesizes the existence of a pre-cosmic, non-rational, malevolent soul—in some cases identified as Isis or at least as feminine—as being responsible for disorder in the world. This non-rational world soul is made into the rational world soul by God’s imparting reason to it, and then produces the corporeal world (by mediating the divine Ideas and imparting them on matter, as previously noted). Further, Plutarch constructs a more active malevolent entity, which he identifies with the indefinite dyad and personifies as Typhon, who works through the non-rational world soul. The following passage from


\(^{46}\) Karamanolis, “Plutarch,” 34; see also Dillon, The Middle Platonists, 215-216.

\(^{47}\) Karamanolis, “Plutarch,” 34-35.
Plutarch’s *On Isis and Osiris* outlines this aspect of the world soul and Typhon’s figuring as a malevolent entity responsible for badness and disorder.

The fact is that the creation and constitution of this world is complex, resulting, as it does, from opposing influences, which, however, are not of equal strength, but the predominance rests with the better. Yet it is impossible for the bad to be completely eradicated, since it is innate, in large amount, in the body and likewise in the soul of the Universe [ψυκή τοῦ παντός], and is always fighting a hard fight against the better. So in the soul Intelligence and Reason [ψυχή νοῦς καὶ λόγος], the Ruler and Lord of all that is good, is Osiris, and in earth and wind and water and the heavens and stars that which is ordered, established, and healthy, as evidenced by seasons, temperatures, and cycles of revolution, is the efflux of Osiris and his reflected image. But Typhon [destruction] is that part of the soul which is impressionable, impulsive, irrational and truculent, and of the bodily part the destructible, diseased and disorderly as evidenced by abnormal seasons and temperatures, and by obscurations of the sun and disappearances of the moon. (*De Iside* 371a-b [Babbitt, LCL])

Philo uses the aforementioned “helpers” of God who play a part in the creation of humans further to distance God from evil and disorder in his account of this malevolence.

The following passages from *On the Creation of the World* and *Questions on Exodus* illustrate this connection and use of these helpers, daemons, or angels:

So we see why it is only in the instance of [human] creation that we are told by Moses that God said “Let us make,” an expression which plainly shows the taking with Him of others as fellow-workers. It is to the end that, when [one] orders [his or her] course aright, when [his or her] thoughts and deeds are blameless, God the universal Ruler may be owned as their Source; while others from the number of His subordinates are held responsible for thoughts and deeds of a contrary sort: for it could not be that the Father should be the cause of an evil thing [κακίαν] to His offspring. (*Op.* 75-75 [Colson and Whitaker])

Into every soul at its very birth there enter two powers, a salutary and a destructive. If the salutary one is victorious and prevails, the opposite one is too weak to be visible. But if the latter prevails, no profit at all or little is obtained by the salutary one. Through these powers the world too was created. People call them by various names; the salutary one they call powerful and beneficent, and the opposite one unbounded and destructive. (*QE* I, 23 [Marcus, LCL])

Turning now to *Apocryphon of John*, we see both a similar continuity with Platonic ideology, especially motifs contained in *Timaeus*, and an elaboration of this material in
line with that of Plutarch, Philo, and Numenius. The similarities between *Apocryphon of John* and writings attributed to philosophers like Plato, Numenius, Philo, and Plutarch help situate this text in a common Middle Platonic ideological tradition, and in light of the text’s sophisticated integration and exegesis of various literary sources, a particularly scholarly tradition. Of equal importance for my purposes, however, are the differences in the narrative representations and usages of Platonic material in *Apocryphon of John* that point to interests particular to this text. From the outset, it is important to note that this comparative project is not conducted to set *Apocryphon of John* against the tradition of Middle Platonism generally or some homogenized reification of the philosophic systems already outlined. While some of the intricacies of *Apocryphon of John* and the use of Christ as a central figure are particular to the text, *Apocryphon of John*’s interpretive strategies are in continuity with the Middle Platonic tradition, a classificatory category in which *Apocryphon of John* must be included, and are made intelligible by comparison.

To begin, as King notes, the fundamental dualism of Platonic metaphysical schemes marked by a distinction between Being and Becoming underlies *Apocryphon of John*’s oppositional framework between the divine and material worlds. Unsurprisingly in the context of Middle Platonic philosophy, *Apocryphon of John* postulates a transcendent supreme deity in reference to the realm of Being who presides over and is the ultimate cause of the universe in its entirety. As such, God is variously described as One (ΤΜΝΤΟΥΑ [BG 22:17]); Monad (ΤΜΟΝΑΚ [II 2:26; IV 3:24]); unity (ΟΥΜΟΝΑΡΧΙΑ [II 2:27; IV 3:24]); having nothing above it or ruling over it (MN ΠΕΤΡΑΡΧΕΙ EXΩΝ [BG 22:18-19], MN ΠΕΤΡΟΟΟΠ ΧΣΩΝ [II 2:27; IV 3:24-25]);

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Father of everything; invisible (πιαρατος [II 2:29, IV 3:27], πιαναυ εροτ [BG 22:21]); more than a god (ουσουο ανουτε πε [II 2:35-36, IV 4:5; see also BG 23:5-6]); having nothing before him (μιν λααυ . . . ωοτν 2ατεχεζη [BG 23:8]);


incorruptible (τμπαττεκο [II 2:30, IV 3:28-29], τεκαφαρκς [BG 22:22]);

superior to perfection, blessedness, and divinity (III 5:5-8, BG 24:9-13, II 3:20-22, IV 5:4-7); superior to unlimitedness and limitedness (III 5:8-10, BG 24:13-15); not corporeal or incorporeal (ξε ν ουσωματικος αν πε ν ουατωυμα αν πε [BG 24:15-17, III 5:10-11; see also II 3:22-23, IV 5:7-8]); not large or small (ουνοσ αν πε ν ουκοι ν αν πε [BG 24:17-18, III 5:11-12; see also II 3:24, IV 5:8-9]); not quantifiable (ουγρ αν πε [BG 24:18, III 5:12-13; see also II 3:25, IV 5:10-11]); and unknowable (III 5:14-15, BG 24:19-20, II 3:26, IV 5:11-12).\footnote{Indeed, BG 24:20-25:1\textsuperscript{50} describes God as beyond even Being itself:}

\footnote{English translations are paraphrased from Waldstein and Wisse, \emph{The Apocryphon of John}, 1995.}

\footnote{See also III 5:16-18, II 3:27-29, and IV 5:12-15.}
He is not at all someone who exists [ετιϊοςπ], but he is something superior to them [ουγοβ ευκοτπ έποογ τη], not as being superior, but as being himself [εποηυ ημιν ἡμος τη].

Typical of the other Platonic creation accounts previously examined, *Apocryphon of John* negotiates the relationship between the intelligible world (and the aforementioned transcendent supreme deity) and sensible cosmos with reference to a series of entities who generate all subsequent creation through a process of mimesis, copying the eternal Ideas of the divine realm and, at least in the case of the corporeal cosmos, transmitting them into matter. The entities of the divine realm in *Apocryphon of John* are produced through acts of self-reflection and might properly be considered emanations of the supreme deity’s divine thought. For example, BG 27:1-7 details the Monad’s first creation of Pronoia:

In every direction he perceived his own image [τεθίκων] by seeing it in the pure [καθαπόν] light-water which surrounds him. And his thought [τεθονοία] became actual and she came forth and attended him.

As in *Timaeus* and the cosmogonic schemes of Philo, Plutarch, and Numenius, a distinct demiurgic entity is proposed as an intermediary between the intelligible and sensible cosmos and chief creator of the latter; in *Apocryphon of John*, this figure is Yaltabaoth (and, to some extent, Sophia).

It is with the figure of the demiurge that *Apocryphon of John* diverges most significantly from Plato’s *Timaeus* and other Platonic literature examined previously. As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, the demiurge of *Timaeus* is unfalteringly benevolent and because of his goodness, desires to create the best possible world by modelling his creation on the perfection of the divine realm. Indeed, it is the observable goodness of the sensible world that leads Timaeus to postulate the existence of both a model and a creator characterized by goodness. Although Plato certainly assumes an
ontological and epistemological inferiority of the copy (the material cosmos) to its model (the divine cosmos), any appearances of disorder are a shortcoming of contingency, explained in reference to the receptacle in *Timaeus*, rather than malevolence. By sharp contrast, *Apocryphon of John*’s Yaltabaoth is essentially and actively malevolent. In the text, he is described as impious (\textit{οὐδετέ} [II 11:18-19]), arrogant (\textit{ἀπονοια} [II 11:18-19]), ignorant (\textit{ἀτκούν} [II 11:19-22]), jealous (\textit{πεψκω} [BG 44:14-18, II 13:8-13]), and deceptive (e.g., BG 55:19-58:1), and characterized by multiplicity (e.g., III 18:10, BG 42:11, II 12:1, IV 18:25-27).\footnote{English translations are paraphrased from Waldstein and Wisse, *The Apocryphon of John*, 1995.} The contrast between Yaltabaoth and the benevolent demiurge of *Timaeus* as well as the general association in Middle Platonic metaphysics of God with goodness is evident even within the text of *Apocryphon of John*. For example, Autogenes, one aspect or offspring of the supreme deity (whom Yaltabaoth is set in opposition to), is repeatedly given the very appellation of goodness:

\begin{quote}
And he anointed him [Autogenes] with his Christhood/goodness [\textit{Χριστός/χριστός}], because he had anointed him with his Christhood/goodness [\textit{Χριστός}]. (BG 30:14-18)
\end{quote}

More generally, as King argues, the kataphatic theology of Yaltabaoth is set against the aforementioned apophatic theology of the supreme deity to highlight the division between these two figures and their respective realms. By contrast to the transcendent divine realm, Yaltabaoth and his underlings are knowable in the worst possible way.

Indeed, where the mimetic activity of the demiurge of *Timaeus* establishes continuity between the divine and material cosmos, Yaltabaoth seems to function as an explanation for the corporeal world’s lack of congruence with divine perfection. Rather than explaining the disorder and destruction of the corporeal world with reference to the
inherent inferiority of the model to the copy, the receptacle, the indefinite dyad, or a shortcoming of matter itself, *Apocryphon of John* accounts for evil by hypothesizing a malevolent creator god. In this scheme, the flaws of the corporeal world are the result of deliberate deception. As King convincingly argues in her own comparative analysis of *Apocryphon of John* and Platonic philosophy, Yaltabaooth’s creation is a “malicious parody” of the divine realm and the proper, benevolent creation we see in this latter realm in *Apocryphon of John* and elsewhere in Platonic literature. Certainly, Yaltabaooth himself is generated from a moment of discontinuity with the proper creation and hierarchy of the upper realm when Sophä performs an act of reproduction without the consent of her masculine counterpart. This moment is described in detail in the following passage:

She, however, did not find her partner [πεκσῡμφωνος] as she was about to decide [ἐκνακατανεύε] without the good will [τευδοκία] of the Spirit [πεννά] and the knowledge of her own partner [πεκσῡμφωνος], and as she brought forth because of the sexual knowledge [πεπρούνικον] which is in her. Her thought could not remain idle and her product came forth imperfect, foreign in his appearance, because she had made him without her consort [πεκσῡνζυγός]. And he was not similar to the likeness of the Mother, for he has another form [κεμορφή]. And she saw him in her deliberation that he was taking on the form [πτυπος] of another likeness, having the face of a snake and the face of a lion. His eyes were shining with fire. She cast him away from her, outside those places that not of the immortal ones [νιαβανατσος] might see him, because she had given birth to him in ignorance. (BG 37:6-38:6; see also III 14:23-15:16, II 9:33-10:14)

The second creation narrative of *Apocryphon of John* initiated in this moment, that is, Yaltabaooth’s creation of the corporeal realm, fails on two accounts. First, though Yaltabaooth seems at some points to look to the divine realm as a model for his creation, his own degenerate character—as an ignorant, arrogant deity—means his creation, too, is

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52 Plutarch’s Typhon seems to function similarly as a malevolent deity, though *On Isis and Osiris* does not contain the same narrative that sees our sensible world deliberately characterized by disorder, decay, and deception.
degenerate. In other cases, Yaltabaoth is entirely blind to the model of the upper realm and thus produces a creation that is alienated from the intelligible realm.53

As in *Timaeus*, the creation of humanity is modelled on the cosmic structure. Yaltabaoth and the archons of the sublunary realm create the first mortal, corporeal human (Adam) in imitation of the divine (“And they saw in the water the form of the image. They said to each other, ‘Let us create a man in the image of God and the likeness’” [BG 48:8-14; see also III 22:4-6, II 15:2-4, and IV 23:10-20]), fashioning his body in great detail with reference to cosmic powers and entities (III 22:18-23:14, BG 49:9-50:14, II 15:13-19:12, IV 24:2-29:21). But when the body does not move with life, the Monad sends down Autogenes to trick Yaltabaoth into breathing Sophia’s divine life and power into Adam. In so doing, *Apocryphon of John* represents the Platonic psychophysical dualism of humans, the superlunar realm’s claim over humans, and the divine’s role in the restoration of proper hierarchy and order. In usurping Yaltabaoth’s creation, the normal inferiority of creation to its creator is overturned and Yaltabaoth is further undermined as an effective demiurge.

Further, where the body’s congruence with the cosmos in *Timaeus*—and also in the salvation schemes of Plutarch and Philo—aids humans in their “quest for true knowledge”54 and corollary actualization of their divine nature, the complementarity between the body and the cosmos in *Apocryphon of John* entraps humans in the material realm and binds them to the powers of the sublunary demiurge and his minions. As King explains, “[t]he arrangement of each part of the body to fit their [Yaltabaoth and the

53 This degeneracy of Yaltabaoth and the archons and their creation is explained in detail in chapter 3.
archons’] nature and their order works only to alienate humanity from its true spiritual nature.” While human nature is superlunary in origin, intervention is required for human self-actualization. This process of revelation is represented within the narrative of the text in Epinoia/Eve’s descent to aid Adam in recognizing his divine essence, “the descent of his defect and its ascent” (BG 53:4-54:4; see also BG 55:15-18, 59:20-60:11, 61:1-7, 63:12-64:3), as well as the text’s general narrative structure as a revelation of Christ.

In all cases, it seems that Apocryphon of John integrates Platonic motifs and metaphysical frameworks by means of exaggeration and elaboration. Specifically, Apocryphon of John takes Plato’s valuation of his dualistic metaphysical scheme distinguishing the realms of the divine/Being and sensible/Becoming and corollary potential for the demotion of the demiurge to an extreme. In so doing, the narrative of the text elevates one hierarchal social structure and system of authority over another. King helpfully summarizes this interpretive strategy:

The establishment of multiple levels of being separating the true Deity from the material world functions primarily to articulate the ideal of hierarchy, whose breach and restoration form the dynamics of the Secret Revelation of John’s entire plot. Without the representation of ideal hierarchy in the Divine Realm, no basis would exist for the foundational critique of evil in the world below as hierarchy overturned.56

For one example of how this strategy works, we can look at the function of the previously outlined apophatic theology of this text. As King explains, traditional readings of apophatic theology focus on the theodicean usefulness of this language in ontologically distancing the divine realm from the lower sensible world.57 Though this

55 King, The Secret Revelation of John, 211.
utility is certainly an effect of negative theology, I agree with King in her assessment both that apophatic language in Apocryphon of John functions alongside kataphatic language to assign value to different realms and their respective deities, creators, or rulers, and that Apocryphon of John—while relying on a dualistic Platonic metaphysical scheme composed of two realms, one superior and the other inferior—is not characterized by the anti-cosmic dualism assumed by this traditional reading (and assumed to be characteristic of so-called gnostic ideology). Although an ontological distancing between God and our world of suffering, disorder, and destruction is the effect of negative theology, Apocryphon of John does not seem to be concerned with using this effect to absolve the transcendent deity from responsibility for care of the corporeal world; indeed, Apocryphon of John characterizes the god-head as deeply concerned with the material world and rectifying its inherent problems, repeatedly sending down divine agents to help humans. Rather, the pairing of negative and positive theology works to locate the source of the rupture of proper divine order and goodness with Yaltabaoth and his minions, and the solution with the transcendent God and God’s divine agents.

The evaluative aspect of Apocryphon of John’s dualistic metaphysical scheme has epistemological implications as well. Such can be clearly seen in Apocryphon of John’s integration of the Platonic trope of mimesis. Platonic mimesis establishes correspondence between the divine paradigm and cosmic and human creation; this correspondence “ensures the possibility of stable knowledge”58 because some reflection of perfect divinity can be recognized in the created cosmos. As King explains, however, the continuity established between the model and creation in Apocryphon of John’s mimesis

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58 King, The Secret Revelation of John, 201.
serves to entrap humans in the deception of Yaltabaoth. The only location of true knowledge is the divine realm and this knowledge is accessible only through revelation\(^{59}\)—specifically, the revelation of Christ.

With this in mind, King suggests *Apocryphon of John* is engaged in a conversation about epistemological authority and advances a critique or undermining of particular rulers’, philosophers’, and deities’ (including the demiurgical creator of the world) purported hold on true and stable knowledge. As she argues,

> [t]he revelation of Christ is not merely a supplement to the partial knowledge of the Divine attainable through observation of the cosmos, as it is for many other Platonists and Christians, [rather,] it is a corrective to the deceptions of the world rulers and the partial truths promulgated by Plato, Moses, and others.\(^{60}\)

It is not through rational contemplation that true knowledge is attained and self-actualization achieved, but rather through the revelation of Christ. King suggests that *Apocryphon of John*’s conception of true knowledge is set in opposition to philosophic traditions, such as those Platonic schemes outlined earlier in this chapter, that conceptualize reason as the means by which humans are restored to their proper greatness. That being said, King underemphasizes the fact that this strategy of epistemologically elevating particular figures as authoritative over and above other contemporary and prior authorities is not unique to *Apocryphon of John*. Other Middle Platonists do the same, albeit with different figures; for example, Philo centres his work around Moses and Plutarch uses Isis and Osiris. The appearance of Christ strengthens my argument for *Apocryphon of John*’s continuity with contemporary non-Christian literature rather than its remarkability or difference from its contemporaries.

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\(^{60}\) King, *The Secret Revelation of John*, 201.
To my mind, the suggestion that *Apocryphon of John* is engaged in an evaluative conversation about epistemological authority comes as no surprise. The text has a quality of erudition in its nuanced integration not only of Platonic ideology but also of material from Jewish Wisdom and scriptural traditions (though this comparative work is not my focus here). King seems to say as much in her suggestion that this sophisticated bricolage of these various ideological materials is a particularly notable feature of *Apocryphon of John*. If *Apocryphon of John* is situated in such a discourse, then the continuity between this text and Platonic and Middle Platonic conversations about the ontological and epistemological structure of the world is both expected—since this ideological material is accessible as part of the cultural milieu surrounding the text—and expedient in relying on both a shared intellectual context and the pre-established cultural, ideological, and scholarly authority of Platonism.

Further, it is not enough to say that *Apocryphon of John* is like other Middle Platonic literature; this text is as surely an example of Middle Platonic ideological strategy as those works attributed to Philo, Plutarch, and Numenius, among many others, despite its being classified otherwise—for example, as (heretically) Christian or gnostic. I would even suggest that *Apocryphon of John* differs from Philo’s, Plutarch’s, and Numenius’ writings only somewhat superficially. *Apocryphon of John* at times uses different cultural content and a different revelatory figure (Christ) to accomplish goals particular to the text but employs the same interpretive strategies as other Middle Platonists. Indeed, the text’s method is what one would mundanely expect of Middle Platonic writings; any differences between *Apocryphon of John* and its philosophical contemporaries are no more inherently or substantively remarkable than those between,
for example, Plutarch and his contemporaries. Were my analysis to focus on Plutarch’s *On Isis and Osiris*, for example, the differences between this text and other Platonic writings like *Apocryphon of John* and those by Philo and Numenius would point to interests particular to Plutarch’s text but would not suggest we situate Plutarch in an entirely different analytic category—Osirology or some such classification. This logic has methodological implications in how we classify *Apocryphon of John* in academic analysis; as is perhaps made obvious by my choice of analyzing the text in comparison with non-Christian contemporary literature, I do not think the presence of Christ in the text is productive grounds for analytic classification. On the contrary, as the comparative work of this chapter demonstrates, analyzing *Apocryphon of John* as a piece of Middle Platonic literature makes the text’s complex narrative logic intelligible. Read through the analytic framework of Platonism, *Apocryphon of John* can ultimately be understood as a mythologized treatise on knowledge and authority that elevates one (divine) hierarchical system over another (corporeal).\(^6\) This comparative work on the ideological and narrative construction of the text and the interpretive strategies employed in the integration of Platonic material guides and strengthens my subsequent gender-based analysis.

\(^6\) Additionally, the methodological framework employed in my analysis does not obviate the possibility of reading *Apocryphon of John* through a different comparative lens such as one based in Jewish or Christian discourses. Certainly, incorporating different modes of comparison leads to a more comprehensive and nuanced view of the text.
3. *Apocryphon of John* and Gender

The gendered content of *Apocryphon of John* and its analysis in this chapter begins with the underlying assumption that gender and sex are socio-historically contingent categories rather than universal truths or biological facts.\(^{62}\) This presupposition has both theoretical and methodological implications for the study of gender/sex\(^{63}\) in Greco-Roman antiquity.\(^{64}\) First, the acknowledgement of gender fluidity demands that we do not assume gender/sex in Greco-Roman antiquity to be substantively identical to our own gender/sex discourses (especially insofar as our own gender/sex system is mediated by the more modern social apparatus of sexuality\(^{65}\)). Second, this demand suggests we ought to shift our analytic focus from examining the *substance* of gender/sex discourses (e.g., asking, What is gender? What is sex?) to considering the *structural* features and functioning of gender/sex as discursive formations that construct and manage human relations. To this end, this chapter focuses on how power\(^{66}\) is deployed through the

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\(^{63}\) I adopt this terminology from Darlene M. Juschka (*Political Bodies/Body Politic: The Semiotics of Gender* [London: Equinox, 2009]) to underscore the interrelation of gender and sex and to show gender as primary in this construction.

\(^{64}\) In articulating the gendered social and ideological context of *Apocryphon of John*, I am looking particularly at a 2nd century C.E. Greek East of the Roman Empire context, but more broadly at a cultural context that imagines itself in continuity with Classical Athens and relies on the cultural material of this earlier period.


\(^{66}\) I am using *power* here to refer to the legitimate access to and exercise of authority embedded within hierarchical social structures.
apparatus of gender/sex to manage and discipline both individual and social bodies. Following an initial outline of gender/sex in Greco-Roman antiquity, I examine the rhetorical function of the gendered motifs of androgyny and hermaphroditism in Greek language literature and connect this usage to the appearance and function of androgyny in *Apocryphon of John*.

Having established the gendered context of *Apocryphon of John*, I then turn my focus to the intellectual work accomplished by the gendered rhetoric of *Apocryphon of John*. My analysis concentrates especially on the motif of androgyny and, based on the dualisms identified in the previous chapter, the contrast between gender ambiguity or dual-genderness in the divine and material realms. In particular, I consider the interplay of variously gendered deities to make sense of the complicated and seemingly ambiguous gendered metaphysical scheme of *Apocryphon of John*. I take seriously my assertion that power is deployed through the apparatus of gender as I analyze the rhetorical functions of gendered language in this text. In so doing, I consider how the gendered dimensions of *Apocryphon of John*’s oppositional narrative construct a masculinized, authoritative divine realm and an effeminate, illegitimate corporeal world by examining and contrasting the gendered characterizations, hierarchical structures, and social relations of the upper and lower realms. Ultimately, I argue that *Apocryphon of John*’s gendered rhetoric supports the oppositional logic of the text so crafted to advance a valuation of two opposing hierarchies of authority.

The fluidity of gender and sex identities apparent in and underlying *Apocryphon of John* perhaps seems less counter-intuitive in ancient contexts than in modern contexts (in which the conventional construction is a two-sex model of gender/sex—i.e., male/female,
man/woman, masculine/feminine are dichotomous pairings rooted in “nature”) in light of
the generalized one-sex model that underlies the construction of gender and sex identities
in Greco-Roman antiquity. Thomas Laqueur offers an extensive exploration of the one-
sex or one-flesh model of sex differentiation that persisted until the 19th century. In this
model, the body is constructed as single-sexed in the sense that all bodies contain the
same anatomical parts and fluids (such as semen and blood). Sex difference is explained
in this model as any deviation from the constructed ideal form, which happens to be
male, in terms of anatomy or physiology. Because the ideal form is equated with
maleness, in this construction women are inverted, deficient men. For example, the 2nd
century C.E. anatomist Galen summarizes the sameness of male and female sex:

> [T]hink first, please, of the man’s [external genitalia] turned in and extending
> inward between the rectum and the bladder. If this should happen, the scrotum
> would necessarily take the place of the uteri, with the testes lying outside, next to it
> on either side; the penis of the male would become the neck of the cavity that had
> been formed; and the skin at the end of the penis, now called the prepuce, would
> become the female pudendum [the vagina] itself. Think too, please, of the converse,
> the uterus turned outward and projecting. Would not the testes [the ovaries] then
> necessarily be inside it? Would it not contain them like a scrotum? Would not the
> neck [the cervix], hitherto concealed inside the perineum but now pendant, be made
> into the male member? And would not the female pudendum, being a skinlike
> growth upon this neck, be changed into the part called the prepuce?  

67 It is important to note when exploring representations of gender, sex, and bodies in
Greco-Roman antiquity that the various representations we examine do not provide to us
direct access to “how things really were” nor do they provide a complete picture of the
variation of discourses on gender, sex, and the body. In the same way that we might find
it ridiculous to generalize a construction of gender/sex from a handful of textual or media
productions today, so too it is problematic to generalize the “whole” of gender/sex in
Greco-Roman antiquity from various “parts.” Further, insofar as I am positioning these
identities as discursive formations, I am not particularly concerned with positing an
external referent for these signifiers. Rather, I am interested in how these discourses
function rhetorically and what is accomplished in their various deployments.

68 Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud.*
69 *De usu partium* II 297-298 (Tallmadge May, *Galen: On the Usefulness of the Parts of
the Body*, 628-629).
The hierarchy of sexual identities that positions men as superior and ideal and women as inferior and deficient does not proceed logically from the one-sex concept; as Laqueur notes, the “arrow of perfection could go either or both ways”\(^70\) in positioning either women as closer to the ideal form or as those bodies on either extreme of this spectrum of bodily sex as ideal. Rather, the biological construction of sex is set in place by a prior discursive sexual hierarchy that positions maleness as superior to femaleness. Specifically, sex difference within the one-sex model “makes vivid and more palatable a hierarchy of heat and perfection that is in itself not available to the senses.”\(^71\) Aristotle, for example, constructs gender in terms of reproductive sexual roles of active (male) versus passive (female) and as contributing the efficient cause or form in reproduction (male) versus providing the material cause (female).\(^72\) In Aristotle’s construction, the active/passive, form/material gendered dichotomies are indubitable facts found in nature while biological differences (i.e., the differences we construct as biological sex in our context) are fairly inconsequential. In this context, the construction of sex (i.e., male and female bodies) thus represents the imposition of “higher truths” concerning masculinity and femininity and maps the body in reference to “natural” gender.\(^73\)

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\(^71\) Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 27.

\(^72\) See *GA*, II, iv: 738b.

\(^73\) For a detailed consideration of Greek theories of opposites, which he describes as “polarity and analogy,” see G. E. R. Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966). For a more recent treatment of this logic, see Maria Michela Sassi in *The Science of Man in Ancient Greece* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), xi, who considers this thinking as concerned with determining differentness; the Greek male is at the centre of this scheme and all other individuals and classes of humans and non-human animals exist in relation to this centre as Others.
A significant variation of this model is the “teratogenic grid” advanced by Holt N. Parker and Jonathan Walters.\textsuperscript{74} This model relates more to gender performance than to the construction of sex identity. The teratogenic grid refers to the sex differentiation of females as passive and males as active; in a phallogocentric system (i.e., a system that privileges the masculine), this construction positions males as penetrators (in sex acts) and females as penetrated. This grid also includes the deficient counterparts to both the active male and passive female: the passive male and active female, respectively. In this model, ideal men are active penetrators and ideal women are passive recipients of penetration; men could penetrate other men, but in so doing, the penetrated man is performing less than ideal masculinity.\textsuperscript{75} Insofar as masculinity is contingent on social status (which I will discuss below), only those of lower social status (either male or female) could be penetrated without this act being considered deviant.

The mapping of gender onto bodies positions the body as the site of gender performance and the upholding of the hierarchical “truths” embedded in gender. The “proper” body (in terms of appearance, action, sex relations, and desire) signifies proper gender, while improperly performed gender represents deviance from the conventional hierarchical construction of gender. Representations of proper gender roles are diverse in these ancient contexts and vary according to different sources and within various genres and “types” of sources (e.g., literary or archaeological sources). My own generalizations of proper gender performance are limited in that the bulk of analysis of gender in Greco-Roman antiquity (as well as my own study of gender in Greco-Roman antiquity) relies

\textsuperscript{74} In Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd C. Penner, \textit{Contextualizing Gender in Early Christian Discourses: Thinking Beyond Thecla} (London, T&T Clark, 2009), 61.

\textsuperscript{75} Vander Stichele and Penner, \textit{Contextualizing Gender in Early Christian Discourses}, 61.
solely on texts, and often elite discourses within these texts. Nonetheless, some generalizations can be made that are helpful in analyzing ancient discourses of gender. For the sake of brevity, I will not go into great detail about the *variety* of gender performances in Greco-Roman antiquity.

In their analysis of physiognomy and *progymnasmata*—rhetorical training manuals for Greek and Roman students—in ancient Greek and Roman contexts, Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner emphasize the importance of discipline of the body and self-control in these texts.\(^7^6\) It is the performance of this control that underlies normative gender in Greco-Roman antiquity; those who exercise self-control are considered ideally masculine, while those who exercise less discipline and self-control are *less* than ideally masculine or, in other words, are marked as feminine. In terms of self-control, the system of physiognomy (which Vander Stichele and Penner identify as an elite discursive practice but suggest permeated non-elite social constructions as well) worked with the underlying assumption that one’s external appearance and actions revealed one’s true, internal character and thus, it is of utmost importance that the external character is highly regulated and disciplined. This disciplining is conducted through a keen attention to self-representation (in terms of clothing, hair, hand gestures, facial expressions, bodily functions, speech) and the encouragement of moderation and self-control (e.g., moderate fulfilment of desires). Vander Stichele and Penner propose that this focus on external

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appearances in physiognomic terms suggests a “context of spectatorship,” in which
visibility is central to the construction and expression of ancient identities.\(^\text{77}\)

Beyond individual bodies, the gendering of bodies and various representations of
gender also played out in the body politic. In this relational context, ideal masculinity is
construed as having control or dominance over other less masculine individuals and
groups. This hierarchal exercise of power is embedded in this gender discourse that
positions masculinity as authoritative, dominant, and powerful; it is thus in accordance
with the “natural” superiority of maleness (again, in light of masculinity representing the
ideal end of the gender scale) that masculine men exert control over others. In particular,
those upon whom power is exerted are women and those of lower social status (such as
slaves), whether male or female. In this relational context, bodily composure and
representation could also characterize groups of people; for example, a conquered group
of people might be represented or characterized as effeminate.\(^\text{78}\) The inherent relation
between gender and power underlies the utility of gendered rhetoric in polemical
discourses including those contained in *Apocryphon of John*.

Although men and women as well as various social groups could perform both
masculine and feminine characteristics, the balance between these characteristics—as

\(^\text{77}\) Vander Stichele and Penner, *Contextualizing Gender in Early Christian Discourses*,
66. The visibility of identity and bodies—and the power thus exercised over bodies
through this ancient sense of Panopticon (to evoke Foucault’s concept of Panopticon
Books, {1977} 1979])—is exemplified in the various public displays of power over
bodies in various spectacles of death and injury including crucifixions, gladiatorial
matches, and practices of *damnatio ad bestias* or condemnation to beasts as a means of
execution. See also Juschka, *Political Bodies/Body Politic: The Semiotics of Gender*,
132-161 on the semiotics of the body in performing masculinity, specifically in the
Roman amphitheatre.

\(^\text{78}\) Vander Stichele and Penner, *Contextualizing Gender in Early Christian Discourses*,
73-75. See also Juschka, *Political Bodies/Body Politic*, 137-146.
masculine or feminine—determines where an individual or a group falls on the gender scale. While the fluidity of gender in this context might not seem conceptually problematic, the correspondence of properly embodied gender to greater “truths” about gender and the social hierarchy create a possibility that improper gender performance on the level of the body would deviate from these “universal” constructions and thus undermine their structure. Indeed, though gender/sex in the body exists essentially on a scale of maleness (i.e., the one-sex model), the corresponding “truths” about gender in terms of the hierarchal relationship between maleness and femaleness construct maleness and femaleness as more dichotomous. Insofar as maleness and femaleness are considered dichotomous or are positioned in a binary relationship, the stability of each of these concepts is mutually dependent on the other: If women act like men in terms of self-control and control of others, then male dominance is undermined. The potential destabilization of the universal truths that position maleness as superior and femaleness as inferior results in anxiety and underlies the necessity that power be exercised over bodies to reinforce this hierarchical structure. Vander Stichele and Penner summarize this point in the following:

Outward appearances are a critical signifier of one’s place in the ancient world and, as such, they have a primary meaning in the context of social relationships, most often hierarchal ones. Indeed, it is precisely in this mapping of the social sphere onto the body that the hierarchies of power can be constituted and maintained within a system of meaning and representation.79

In the sense that the deployment of gender discourses is a means by which bodies are disciplined and power is exercised over individuals and social groups, when we encounter representations of gender/sex and related issues (such as the regulation of

sexual activity and social relations), we should always analyze this data in terms of power, especially regarding the formation of identity. The association between gender and power means that gender has a great deal of social, ideological, economic, and political utility. Indeed, gender-based rhetoric is frequently employed in literature from this period to serve various goals and interests, especially related to the construction of identity. In these rhetorical usages, either end of the “ancient gradient of masculinity”\(^{80}\) is represented, with denotations of ideal masculinity used to rhetorically elevate and effeminacy used to rhetorically denigrate individuals or social groups. For example, Philo reflects and employs the Roman imperial gender ideology in which the emperor is constructed rhetorically as an ideal model of masculinity:

This is Caesar, who calmed the storms which were raging in every direction, who healed the common diseases which were afflicting both Greeks and barbarians. … This is he who did not only loosen but utterly abolish the bonds in which the whole of the habitable world was previously bound and weighed down. This is he who destroyed both the evident and the unseen wars which arose from the attacks of robbers. … This is he who gave freedom to every city, who brought disorder into order, who civilized and made obedient and harmonious, nations which before his time were unsociable, hostile, and brutal. … [T]he guardian of peace, the distributor to every man of what was suited to him, the man who proffered to all the citizens favours with the most ungrudging liberality, who never once in his whole life concealed or reserved for himself any thing that was good or excellent.\(^{81}\)

As Colleen Conway explains, Philo’s enthusiastically positive portrayal of Augustus is used to support his argument against divine honours for Gaius: “If such an extraordinary emperor as Augustus neither demanded nor elicited worship from the Jews, neither

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\(^{81}\) Legat. 21.147-149 (Colleen M. Conway, Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008], 49).
should Caligula.” By contrast, but working within the same gender system, Diana Swancutt argues that the literary motif of the *tribas* was deployed as an “imperial stereotype of androgynous Greek gender-monsters enervating the empire” to discursively undermine Roman matrons and Greeks whose social capital was perceived as threatening. In all cases, rhetorical representation of gender is used in the discursive construction of both masculinity and femininity. For the purpose of this project, of particular interest is how the motifs of androgynty and hermaphroditism are equated with effeminacy to denigrate and delegitimize the authority of certain individuals and social groups in various examples from Greek literature and in *Apocryphon of John*.

In the ancient sources I have examined in my research, human androgynty, hermaphroditism, and related concepts are without exception negatively characterized, though the grounds on which these characterizations are based vary. Luc Brisson begins his extensive treatment of the motif of androgynty in Greco-Roman antiquity by examining the extremely negative characterization of hermaphroditism as a bestial, monstrous mutation. In this construction, the possession of both male and female anatomy renders sexual reproduction impossible and thus threatens the stability and perpetuation of social organization at the level of the family and the broader social group.

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82 Conway, *Behold the Man*, 49.
83 Swancutt identifies the *tribas* as a “Roman stereotype…of a phallic…wo/man or hermaphrodite” (Diana Swancutt, “*Still Before Sexuality*: ‘Greek’ Androgynty, the Roman Imperial Politics of Masculinity and the Roman Invention of the *Tribas*,” in *Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses*, eds. Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, {2007} 2010], 14) and the “embodiment of Greek gender-disease enervating the [Roman] empire” (Swancutt, “*Still Before Sexuality*,” 13).
84 Swancutt, “*Still Before Sexuality*,” 12.
This sentiment concerning the insecurity and threat caused by androgyny is apparent in Philo's *The Contemplative Life*:

In Plato's banquet the talk is almost entirely concerned with love, not merely with the love-sickness of men for women, or women for men, passions recognized by the laws of nature, but of men for other males differing from them only in age. … The chief part is taken up by the common vulgar love which robs men of the courage which is the virtue most valuable for the life both of peace and war, sets up the disease of effeminacy [θηλεῖαν δὲ νόσον, disease of femaleness] in their souls and turns into a hybrid of man and woman [ἀνδρογύνος, man-woman] those who should have been disciplined in all the practices which make for valour. … As a side growth we have another greater evil of national importance. Cities are desolated, the best kind of men become scarce, sterility and childlessness ensue through the devices of these who imitate men who have no knowledge of husbandry by sowing not in the deep soil of the lowland but in briny fields and stony and stubborn places, which not only give no possibility for anything to grow but even destroy the seed deposited within them. (*Cont.*, VII:59-63 [Colson, LCL])

The discovery of an androgyne was sometimes dealt with by purification, expiation, or exposure; in later periods, androgyny is reconstructed as a rare but naturally explicable anatomical malformation. Mathew Kuefler describes various Roman practices of dealing with hermaphroditism that essentially disregard the sex ambiguity by “assigning” a gender to the individual in question. As Kuefler explains, it is specifically the female markers of dual gender identity that are ignored in assigning to androgynes a male gender. That being said, while hermaphroditism is more tolerable in later contexts, it is still a defect and a mark of less-than-perfect masculinity.

The association of androgyny with effeminacy is the most prevalent characterization I identified in my survey of references to this motif in Greek-language

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86 Brisson, *Sexual Ambivalence*, 31-37. Brisson uses the writings of Diodorus Siculus, a 1st century B.C.E. Greek author to illustrate this less cruel characterization of androgyny.
89 See, for example, Richard McDougall, trans., *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite* (Pantheon Books: New York, 1980) and Michel Foucault’s introduction to this work.
literature and underlies the pejorative use of this term. I list a number of examples of such characterizations below:

Do you not see how, in the passage before us, the lawgiver represents the athlete of noble pursuits. … In him we have the original pattern of the practiser’s soul, one at war with every man that is effeminate and emasculated \( \text{ἐκτεθηλυσμένος καὶ ἀνδρογύνω, } \) emasculated and male-female. (Philo, *Somn.*, I:126 [Colson and Whitaker, LCL])

So earnestly and carefully does the law desire to train and exercise the soul to manly courage that it lays down rules even about the kind of garment which should be worn. It strictly forbids a man to assume a woman’s garb, in order that no trace, no merest shadow of the female, should attach to him to spoil his masculinity...It considered that in such matters the true man should maintain his masculinity...In the same way he trained the woman to decency of adornment and forbade her to assume the dress of a man, with the further object of guarding against the manish-woman as much as the womanish-man \( \text{ἀνδρογύνους σύτως καὶ γυναύδρους}. \)

He knew that as in buildings, if one of the foundation stones is removed, the rest will not remain as they are. (Philo, *Virt.*, IV:18-21 [Colson, LCL])

Thus, knowing that in assemblies there are not a few worthless persons who steal their way in and remain unobserved in the large numbers which surround them, it guards against this danger by precluding all the unworthy from entering the holy congregation. It begins with the men who belie their sex and are affected with effemination \( \text{θήλειαν νόσου ἀνδρογύνων, } \) men-women affected by the disease of femaleness], who debase the currency of nature and violate it by assuming the passions and the outward form of licentious women. (Philo, *Spec. leb.*, I, lx:324-325 [Colson, LCL])

In former days the very mention of it [pederasty] was a great disgrace, but now it is a matter of boasting not only to the active but to the passive partners, who habituate themselves to endure the disease of effemination \( \text{νόσου θήλειαν νοσεῖν, disease of femaleness}, \) let both body and soul run to waste, and leave no ember of their male sex-nature to smoulder...In fact the transformation of the male nature to the female is practised by them as an art and does not raise a blush. These persons are rightly judged worthy of death by those who obey the law, which ordains that the man-woman \( \text{ἀνδρόγυνον} \) who debases the sterling coin of nature should perish unavenged, suffered not to live for a day or even an hour, as a disgrace to himself, his house, his native land and the whole human race. (Philo, *Spec. leb.*, III, vii: 37 [Colson, LCL])

When Philip invaded the Peloponnesus, and someone said, “There is danger that the Spartans may meet a dire fate if they do not make terms with the invader,” Damindas exclaimed, “You poor womanish thing \( \text{ἀνδρόγυνε, man-woman} \)! What dire fate could be ours if we have no fear of death?” (Plutarch, *Mor.*, *Sayings of Spartans, Damindas* [Babbitt, LCL])
And yet other persons publicly styled themselves Benefactors, Conquerors, Saviours, or The Great; but no one would be able to tell the tale of their marriages one after another, like the matings of horses, as they spent their days with no restraint amid herds of women, their corruption of boys, their beating of drums in the company of emasculated men [ἀνδρογυνώοις, men-women], their daily dicing, their flute-playing in the public theatres, the night that was too short for them at their dinners, and the day at their breakfasts. (Plutarch, Mor., On the Fortune of Alexander, 338 [Babbitt, LCL])

Hermaphroditus is an effeminate pansy [ἡμιανδρος, half-man], half one thing and half the other in appearance, for you can’t tell whether he’s a boy or a girl. (Lucian, Dialogues of the Gods, Apollo and Dionysus, 3 [MacLeod, LCL])

In each of these cases, it is specifically the appearance of femaleness that is construed as problematic in precluding the performance of proper masculinity. It is thus not gender ambivalence itself that is problematic, but rather, androgyny—the mixing of femaleness into maleness (in terms of behaviour, appearance, dress, and speech)—is used to denote failed masculinity. In this way, androgyny is a substantively empty catchphrase used to categorize, describe, and explain any deviation from ideal, proper, masculine behaviour. The pejorative utility of androgyny and the equation of androgyny with effeminacy are underscored in the passages above, in which some liberty has been taken in the various translations of ἀνδρογυνή and similar terms describing gender ambivalence. For example, in the above-translated passage from Lucian’s Dialogues of the Gods, Apollo and Dionysus, ἡμιανδρος, literally half-man, is translated as “effeminate pansy.”

Of particular importance is how the pejorative function of androgyny relies on a gender system that constructs effeminacy as something undesirable. Rather than interpreting these texts as making normative claims about androgyny—or even about the individuals or social groups characterized as androgynous girly-men or pansies—our attention is more productively focused on the intellectual work accomplished through the deployment of these normative gender constructions. In particular, motifs of effemination
create an Other against whom to construct and affirm normative masculinity. As Conway summarizes, “concepts of masculinity and effeminacy were part of a larger system designed to separate true men from everyone else.”

The motif of androgyny in Greco-Roman literature appears to be more nuanced in reference to primal archetypes and divine beings. While human androgyny is consistently characterized negatively in its association with improper masculinity or effeminacy and is thus applied pejoratively to various individuals or social groups, primal or divine androgyny is constructed as characteristic and indicative of idealized perfection. The androgyny of archetypes and primal beings logically follows from the positioning of these beings in a creation prior to the world of differentiation in which humans presently live. As Brisson explains,

Anything that is at the origin of all things must be all-encompassing and itself imply the coincidence of opposites. In all the opposites that structure reality it must be possible, if only in exceptional circumstances, to pass from one pole to the other. 

Brisson makes a distinction between androgyny in mythic narratives as either successive, which refers to the transformation of gender from male to female or female to male, or simultaneous. Simultaneous androgyny, the performance of both male and female gender/sex, characterizes archetypes or primal beings and is the kind of androgyny that appears in *Apocryphon of John* in reference to the all-encompassing godhead of the upper realm. It is helpful to note that primal or archetypical androgyny (i.e., Brisson’s simultaneous androgyny) is not at all unique to *Apocryphon of John* but is prevalent in a broad range of ancient Greco-Roman literature from a variety of literary

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90 Conway, *Behold the Man*, 30. For an illustration of Conway’s argument, see especially constructions of Spartan masculinity in, for example, Plutarch’s *Sayings of Spartans, The Ancient Customs of the Spartans*, and *Sayings of Spartan Women.*

genres. Brisson spends the bulk of his discussion of archetypical androgyny comparing appearances of this motif characterizing various divine figures of Orphism, the Chaldean Oracles, Hermetism, other so-called gnostic texts and traditions, and Platonic tradition.\(^9\)

While a similar comparison is beyond the scope of this analysis, having already established *Apocryphon of John*’s continuity with (Middle) Platonic literature, some examples of archetypical androgyny can be helpfully drawn from this tradition.

For an extensive treatment of primal androgyny, the speech of Aristophanes in Plato’s *Symposium* (189c-193e) is paradigmatic. In this passage, Aristophanes describes the original condition of human beings in three kinds of undifferentiated pairings: male-male, female-female, and male-female. In this state, reproduction is not performed through sexual union; rather, the pairs are permanently united and instead generate by emerging from the earth. Differentiation between male and female occurs as a punishment by Zeus for the double beings’ attempted assault on the sky and the gods. Zeus ruptures this primal unity and androgyny and splits each pair in half. The fissure is at first disastrous, resulting in the halves of a pair clinging to each other in longing for their lost union until they waste away and die. To remedy this problem, each half’s head is turned around and the genitals are placed in front to allow the halves to copulate together, thus achieving intermittent and momentary union.

What is important to note in this narrative is the persistence of a longing or nostalgia for primal unity and perfection that configures permanent fusion and a return to this perfect state as an expectation or ultimate project.\(^9\) In a similar vein, as will be discussed later, the restoration of worldly deficiency in *Apocryphon of John* occurs by the

\(^9\) Brisson, *Sexual Ambivalence*, 82.
perpetuation of the divine superlunary lineage through the union of Adam and Eve.

Further, it is the restoration of this proper human lineage to which salvation is oriented in this text. It is thus because of the present world’s imperfection that a perfect world is imagined in mythic narrative to remedy this deficiency.

An example of the incorporation of Plato’s concept of primal androgyny in later Platonic literature can be seen in Philo’s explication of the dual creation of humans cited in chapter 2 (Op. 134). In this passage, the genderlessness or archetypical androgyny of primal humans is an effect of Platonic mimesis in reflecting divine perfection. Indeed, the primal androgyny of humans is construed as a reflection of divine androgyny, and it is according to this logic that we expect and find allusions to divine androgyny in Middle Platonic literature. Again in De Opificio Mundi, Philo characterizes the world itself (which constitutes Philo’s transcendent deity) as dual gendered:

We may say that it is in its nature both male [ἕρμην] and female [θηλυς], and is a result of the distinctive power of either. (Op. 13 [Colson and Whitaker, LCL])

Similarly, Plutarch divides the divine creator in reference to two distinct gods, one masculine and the other feminine: Osiris and Isis. Further to constructing a dual-gendered god-head with this strategy, Plutarch characterizes Isis herself as androgynous:

Thus they make the power of Osiris to be fixed in the Moon, and say that Isis, since she is generation, is associated with him. For this reason they also call the Moon the mother of the world, and they think that she has a nature both male and female [ἕρμην ὥμοιοςθηλυς, hermaphrodite], as she is receptive and made pregnant by the Sun, but she herself in turn emits and disseminates into the air generative principles. (De Iside, 368e-d [Babbitt, LCL])

A further illustration of archetypical, and specifically, divine androgyny is present in Apocryphon of John. In this text, the all-encompassing Monad is constituted by masculine and feminine and masculine-feminine divine entities. For example, God’s first emanation, Barbelo/Pronoia/Epinoia is both feminine and masculine. As the “image
of the invisible One, the perfect power” (BG 27:12-14; see also III 7:18-19, II 4:34-35), she is mimetically identical to the perfect Monad and her femininity is not emphasized. As such, she is also described with masculine appellations as the first man (BG 27:19-20; see also III 7:23-24, II 5:7, IV 7:21) and “the thrice-male, the thrice-powerful, the thrice-named, the thrice-begotten (BG 27:21-28:2; see also III 8:1-3, II 5:8-9, IV 7:22-23). Simultaneously, as the womb of everything (ΜΗΤΡΑ ΜΠΛΗΡΗ [II 5:5]) and counterpart to God in the creation of the divine realm, she is feminine. The androgyyny of this second divine principle is indeed explicitly noted in the text: She is the “androgy nous (ΦΟΥΤΣΙΜΕ) unaging aeon [foreknowledge], who came forth from his providence (ΤΕΥΠΡΟΝΟΙΑ)” (BG 28:2-4; see also III 8:3-5, II 5:9). As Peter Schäfer summarizes in his treatment of Barbelo’s androgyyny, “[a]s the Father’s identical image she is male, and as his distinct counterpart she is female.”94 Further, the god-head itself constituted by these various entities is androgy nous:

This is the pentad of aeons of the Father, which is the first Man, the image of the invisible One. This is Barbelo, and Thought [ΤΕΥΝΟΙΑ], and Foreknowledge, and Indestructibility, and Eternal Life. This is the androgy nous [ΖΟΥΤ ΖΙΜΕ] pentad, which is the decad of aeons, which is the Father of the unbegotten Father. (BG 29:8-18; see also III 9:3-10, II 6:2-10)

Additionally, superlunary reproduction properly occurs between masculine and feminine counterparts and the omission of either entity is remarkable and ultimately disastrous. Sophia’s generation of Yaltabaoth reinforces the necessity of both masculine and feminine entities in reproduction:

Our fellow-sister, Wisdom [ΤΣΩΦΙΑ], being an aeon, conceived a thought from herself, and in the conception of the Spirit and Foreknowledge. She wanted to bring forth the likeness out of herself, although the Spirit had not agreed with her nor consented, nor had her consort approved, namely the male virginal Spirit

By contrast to this deficient act of reproduction, the chief deity ultimately responsible for all creation is characterized by both feminine and masculine familial appellations: 

Mother-Father [ΤΜΗΤΡΟΠΑΤΩΡ] (II 6:16).

There is another system of divine androgyny in Apocryphon of John represented by Yaltabaoth and his various entities, some of which are feminine (Pronoia [BG 43:12, 49:16; III 23:1; II 12:17, 15:15] and Sophia/Wisdom [BG 44:3, 50:3-4; III 23:5; II 12:23-24]), but this androgyny is set in opposition to the archetypical androgyny we see in other Platonic material by Yaltabaoth’s generally degenerate characterization. Indeed, he is more akin to the monstrous, effeminate androgyne referenced in Brisson’s work. The following passage describing Yaltabaoth’s generation is illustrative of this supremely negative characterization.95

And he was not similar to the likeness of the Mother, for he has another form [ΚΕΜΟΡΦΗ]. And she saw him in her deliberation that he was taking on the form of another likeness, having the face of a snake and the face of a lion. His eyes were shining with fire. She cast him away from her, outside those places that none of the immortal ones might see him, because she had given birth to him in ignorance. (BG 37:16-38:6; see also III 15:4-16, II 10:6-14)

There is one further dimension of archetypical androgyny that is essential to outline prior to analyzing Apocryphon of John itself: The motif of perfect primal androgyny relies on the same hierarchal configuration of gender as a scale of human perfection in which the arrow of perfection points toward masculinity as an ideal. Put another way, insofar as masculinity is construed as perfection, archetypes are necessarily masculinized. If this archetype is characterized by androgyne and undifferentiation, then this

95 The rhetorical usefulness of Yaltabaoth’s emasculated character in relation to the representation of divine perfection will be examined later in this chapter.
genderlessness is actually equivalent to masculinity. If perfect gender (i.e., masculinity) is ideally undifferentiated in the primal realm, this masculinity is not contingent, but, rather, is uncontested. In her discussion of androgynous divinity and masculinity, Conway summarizes:

[I]f masculinity is equated with perfection, unity, rationality, order, and completeness, as it was in the ancient world, God would necessarily be masculine, even while incorporeal and asexual. Rather than transcending gender, God is the perfect example of masculinity.96

This uncontested masculinity is thus distinguished from the relational masculinity of the human realm, whereby masculinity is acquired relative to another’s emasculation.

The overarching characterization of the upper deities of Apocryphon of John by archetypical perfection and completeness is thus a useful point of departure for analyzing the divine cosmos as masculinized. For example, in describing the Monad, the text reads,

He does not need anything for he cannot be perfected [ΟΥΑΣΧΟΚΣ ΠΕ], as if he were lacking and thus needing to be perfected; rather he is always completely perfect [ΝΙΜ ΟΥΧΩΚ ΘΗΨ ΠΕ]. (BG 23:10-14; see also II 3:3-7, IV 4:11-15)

He is neither perfection [ΟΥΜΝΤΕΛΙΟΣ] nor blessedness [ΟΥΜΝΤΝΑΙΑΤΗ] nor divinity [ΟΥΜΝΤΝΟΥΤΕ], but he is something far superior to them. (BG 24:9; see also III 5:5-8, II 3:20-22, IV 5:4-7)

He desires himself alone in the perfection [ΠΧΩΚ] of the light. (BG 25:9-11; see also III 6:2-3)

Similarly, Barbelo/Pronoia is described as perfection:

She is the perfect Providence [ΤΠΡΟΝΟΙΑ ΕΤΧΗΚ] of [everything]. (BG 27:10-11)

So too is Autogenes/Christ perfect:

And he anointed him with his Christhood/goodness [ΤΕΥΜΝΤΧΗ] so that he became perfect [ΤΕΛΙΟΣ]. (BG 30:14-16; see also III 9:24-10:1, II 6:23-24)

96 Conway, Behold the Man, 36.
And likewise, the first man of the upper realm is called perfect (BG 35:3-4, III 13:2, II 8:32). This heavy-handed attribution of perfection to the divine cosmos elevates the entities of this realm above even human masculine perfection and extends the gender-sex-perfection hierarchy into the divine realm. As expected, the gender system underlying *Apocryphon of John* is thoroughly androcentric in placing maleness, masculinity, and men, by their association with perfection, at the head of this social and ideological hierarchy. By contrast, femaleness, femininity, and women are ways of classifying any departure from masculine perfection.

The one-sex model underlying this association between masculinity and perfection and the implications of this system on the stability of gender are mediated by *Apocryphon of John*’s fundamental dualism that constructs the intelligible realm as superior and the corporeal world as inferior. The divine cosmos’ incorporeality is indeed a primary distinguishing feature between the two cosmos and has implications for the gendered rhetoric of this narrative. Specifically, as Conway convincingly articulates, this

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97 Conway describes a number of figures who transcend the human realm and become divine through their ideal masculinity, including Caesar Augustus, Philostratus’ Apollonius of Tyana, and Philo’s Moses. For example, Philo characterizes Moses by perfection, comparing him to the “greatest [μεγίστον] and most perfect [τελειότοτο] of men” (*Mos.* 1.1, [Conway, *Behold the Man*, 53]), emphasizing his beautiful appearance (*Mos.* 1.9, 15, 18) and nature (*Mos.* 1.59), and describing his self-mastery and self-discipline (*Mos.* 1.26, 29, 154). As a reward for his proper conduct, God elevates Moses’ status as his divine heir (*Mos.* 1.155) and Philo thoroughly deifies Moses in describing Moses with the same title as God (*Mos.* 1.158) and articulating his apotheosis: The Father “resolved his twofold nature of soul and body into a single unity, transforming his whole being into mind, pure as the sunlight” (*Mos.* 2.288 [Conway, *Behold the Man*, 55]). In *Apocryphon of John*, too, we see the extension of masculine perfection to the divine realm both in the masculinized characterization of the superlunar deities and the apotheosis of Adam and his lineage.
characteristic incorporeality itself is a masculinized qualification.\textsuperscript{98} The logic supporting this argument relies on the conceptualization of the body as an unstable basis for gender identity. First, because sexual anatomy provides no assurance of the successful performance of its corresponding gender—since gender, and more precisely, femaleness marks a \textit{difference} in bodies rather than a label pertaining to a substantive distinction between males and females—greater emphasis is placed on proper gendered conduct. On the other hand, and somewhat paradoxically, while the body cannot guarantee one’s manliness, it can also reveal aspects of one’s gender identity. For example, this assumption underlies the following passage from Philo:

\begin{quote}
And, it seems to me, just as bodily properties are seen in mirrors, so those of the soul (are seen) in the face and countenance. But a shameless look and an elevated neck and a continuous movement of the eyebrows and a pompous walk [βαδισμὸς σεοβημένου] and not blushing at, or being ashamed of, any evil at all is the sign of a lewd soul [ψυχῆς σιχίστης], which clearly pictures and describes the forms of its invisible disgraces on its visible body. (\textit{QG IV}, 99 [Marcus, LCL])
\end{quote}

Since the upper cosmos is characteristically incorporeal, its gendered character relies \textit{exclusively} on its disembodied performance and is more stable for this reason. The qualities and conduct attributed to the upper deities fit seamlessly with conventional contemporary constructions of masculinity that associate maleness with activeness, control, virtue, unity, and, as already mentioned, perfection (according to the positioning of a vertical hierarchy of human perfection alongside a hierarchy of mundane to divine) and incorporeality. Since gender is a relational category, each of these masculine traits has a corresponding feminized trait: activeness/passiveness, domination/submission, control/lack of control, virtue/vice, unity/differentiation, perfection/imperfection,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{98} Again, Philo’s Moses’ apotheosis is a useful comparative case of the incorporeality of perfect masculinity.
\end{flushright}
incorporeality/corporeality. In a remarkably clear passage, Philo articulates this series of gendered binaries:

For progress is indeed nothing else than the giving up of the female gender [τοῦ θῆλεος γένους] by changing into the male, since the female gender is material, passive, corporeal and sense-perceptible [ὕλικον καὶ πάσχον καὶ σωματικὸν καὶ αἰσθητικὸν], while the male is active, rational, incorporeal and more akin to mind and thought [δραστήριον καὶ λογικὸν καὶ ἀσώματον καὶ νῦν τε καὶ λογισμῷ οἴκειότερον]. (QE I, 8 [Marcus, LCL])

Further to their incorporeal ontology, the upper deities are active, virtuous, rational, and “akin to mind.”

The upper realm’s equation to rationality and mind is a prominent feature of its masculinity. Apocryphon of John’s upper realm is, in fact, the Platonic realm of Ideas that exists prior to and as the paradigm for the secondarily created corporeal world.

Further, the deities of this realm are repeatedly given appellations related to mind. There are numerous instances of such titles characterizing the divine realm:

He [the Monad] will contemplate [ἐπιθυμεῖν] the pure light. (BG 25:11-12; see also III 6:4)

He [the Monad] is knowledge-giving knowledge. [ὁγνώστητε πει ἐπιθυμεῖν] (II 4:5-6; see also BG 25:17-18, III 6:9, IV 6:3-4)

Foreknowledge [ἀπωστρέπεται κόσμον, τιτροφωσικὸς in II] came forth and stood in attendance together with Thought [τεννοια], which is Providence [τετραποια]. (BG 28:8-10; see also III 8:9-10, II 5:15-16)

This is the pentad of aeons of the Father, which is the first Man, the image of the invisible One. This is Barbelo, and Thought [τεννοια], and Foreknowledge [πωσι κόσμον, τιτροφωσικὸς in II], and Indestructibility, and Eternal Life. (BG 29:8-14; see also III 9:3-8, II 6:2-7)

And he [Christ/Autogenes] requested to give him one thing, the Mind [πνευματικό], and the invisible Spirit consented. The Mind [πνευματικό] came forth. (BG 31:5-8; see also III 10:9-12, II 6:33-7:1)

He [the Monad] granted him [Christ/Autogenes] all authority and subjected to him the truth which is in him that he may know [ἐπιστήμην] [everything]. (BG 32:15-18; see also III 11:12-13, II: 7:25-27)
Additionally, Barbelo is described as the first thought (εννοια) (BG 27:18) and Providence (τιτρόνοια) of everything (III 7:16-17, BG 27:10-11, II 4:31-32). In the cosmogony of the upper realm, among the lights are Will (ποιωμ, θεθμα), Thought (εννοια), Understanding (τευνοια), Perception (τεοια). The deities of the upper realm are essentially personified rationality. The intelligible and rational characterization of the upper realm sets it apart from the lower realm and masculinizes the entities by which it is constituted.

The association of the divine realm with rationality and mind is tied to its characterization as active; it is through thoughts and rational contemplation that the divine entities’ generative activeness is displayed. In the following passages, active thoughts become substantivized to produce offspring:

And his thought [ΤΕΩΝΝΟΙΑ] became actual and she came forth. (BG 27:4-6; see also III 7:12-13, II 4:26-27, IV 7:1-3)

And his will [ΠΕΩΥΩΜ] became actual and came forth. (BG 31:13-14; see also III 10:17-18, II 7:6-7)

And because of the invincible power [ΤΟΜ...ΝΑΤΡΟ] which is in her, her thought did not remain idle [ΜΠΕΝΕΜΕΕΥΕ ΩΩΤΕ ΝΑΡΓΟΝ] and a product came forth from her. (II 10:1-3; see also III 15:3-6, BG 37:10-14)

We can see also in Philo an association between divine generative activity and masculinity; this relationship is not unique to Apocryphon of John’s narrative. Philo employs Sophia’s dual-genderness to various ends; insofar as Sophia is generative and active, Philo considers her masculine, and indeed, her functions in the upper heavenly realm lead Philo to masculinize her as Logos. Again, as in the case of the divine realm’s incorporeal and rational masculinity, the active characterization of the upper realm’s beings extends the ideal of masculine activeness into a superhuman realm.

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99 Conway, *Behold the Man*, 52.
Displays of virtue, too, raise individuals along the vertical axis of the scale of masculine (human) perfection. Philo describes virtue as “male, since it causes movement and affects conditions and suggests noble conceptions of noble deeds and words” (Abr. 99-102 [Colson, LCL]) and certainly accolades of virtue are a way of exhibiting proper manliness. But, again, if masculinity is a scale of human perfection, then virtue is masculinized only insofar as it exists in reference to this vertical axis. Thus, we see in Greco-Roman antiquity both men and women being commended for their proper conduct.

For example, these three inscriptions praise women for various displays of virtue:

For her benevolence, the male and female members of the society crowned Stratonike daughter of Menekrates, who was priestess of Cybele and Apollo in the 178th year, with a crown with a band engraved on a plaque that was announced and another crown with a band that was announced in the synagogue of Zeus. (IApamBith 35, Bithynia, 119 or 104 B.C.E.)

The dyers set this up from their own resources to honor Claudia Ammion[...], priestess of the Augusti and high priestess of the city for life, having served as director of contests in a magnificent and extravagant manner, and having conducted her life in purity and with self-control. (TAM V.2 972 = IGRR IV 1242, Lydia, 50 C.E.)

The Council, the People, and the synod of initiates of the goddess honored the sisters Claudia Antonia Sabina Prokliane and Claudia Antonia Juliane, the theologians, for everything which they zealously offered with respect to piety toward the goddess and the festival of the initiates. (ISmyrna 653, Smyrna, 1st to 2nd century C.E.)

Likewise, both feminine and masculine divine entities of Apocryphon of John are masculinized, perfected, by their virtuous conduct. Virtuous behaviour in this context refers to conduct that displays benevolence, self-mastery (the masculine discipline and

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self-control outlined earlier in the chapter), and piety (i.e., deference to authority).\textsuperscript{103} The Monad is benevolent in his rule, being described as “the always good One, the One who gives good, the One who does good” (BG 25:18-19; see also III 6:9-10, II 4:6-7, IV 6:4-5), having mercy on Sophia and correcting her deficiency (III 21:2-11, BG 46:15-47:7, II 14:1-9), and sending emissaries to aid in remediying the disorder of the lower realm and restoring humans to their divine essence (III 24:1-14, 24:25-25:17; BG 51:8-52:1, 52:17-53:17; II 19:18-33, 20:9-24; IV 29:26-30:18, 31:3-23). The god-head does not react to Sophia’s improper behaviour and the subsequent disorder of Yaltabaoth’s creation with vengeance, anger, or jealousy but concocts a solution that is both immediate in remediying this disorder and eternal in rescuing humans from the degenerate material world in all subsequent generations. Regarding the piety of virtuous conduct, as will be explained in more detail later in this chapter, each entity and level of the divine hierarchy graciously defers to the authority of its superiors. It is not surprising that this social hierarchy of virtue extends into the divine hierarchy.

Further to its gendered characterizations, the articulation of social relations between these various superlunary beings constructs this realm itself as one of perfection, with this denotation relying primarily on the upper realm’s figuring as a properly ordered, hierarchically structured, and unified system. The first section of the text following Christ’s opening frame story sets up this hierarchy by describing in great detail the theogony of the upper divine triad of Father (the Monad), Mother (Barbelo and her various emanations), Son (Autogenes) and the cosmogony of the rest of the divine cosmos (the four lights and their various aeons and inhabitants). The transcendent

Father/Monad is placed as the head of the divine realm in its entirety, and of the patriarchal god-head family specifically.

The motif of mimesis reflected in each moment of divine reproduction underlies the construction of this hierarchy and is thus a useful feature on which to centre our analysis. As I established in chapter 2, (Platonic) mimesis works to mediate a transcendent deity’s relationship to its creation as a process by which continuity is established between the divine model (the Ideas) and the copy (matter). The continuity thus established between the Monad and Barbelo, Autogenes, and the rest of the upper realm affirms this primary creation’s goodness as well as the goodness of the god-head as a benevolent artificer. For example, Barbelo is the “likeness of the light, the image [Thetaikon] of the invisible One” (BG 27:12-13; see also III 7:17-18, II 4:31-35). At the same time, however, the text does not obscure the assumption that copies are inferior to their models. While the divine entities of the upper realm are characterized by positive appellations of masculine perfection, which I have outlined in detail previously, they are also explicitly lesser than the Monad. For example, Autogenes “does not equal his [the Monad’s] greatness” (II 6:14-15; see also III 9:15, BG 30:3-4) and is described as a god while the Monad is “more than a god” (BG 23:5-6, II 2:35, IV 4:5). The evaluative aspect of Platonic mimesis that positions the copy as inferior to the model is thus expedient in reaffirming the vertically structured hierarchy of this system.

Further, at each generative moment, the authority of each generated being’s creator is acknowledged and honoured. With the sole exceptions of the Monad’s first generative act of producing Barbelo and Sophia’s production of Yaltabaoth (which will be examined in more detail later), each moment of reproduction is preceded by a request for the
forthcoming production and a granting of consent by the Father. Only when this consent is granted does reproduction occur. For example, Barbelo first requests foreknowledge from the Father, who then consents, and “when he had consented, Foreknowledge came forth” (BG 28:4-9; see also III 8:5-9, II 5:11-15). This hierarchical system is affirmed after reproduction as well. After the Father begets Barbelo, “she glorified [\(\text{\textalpha\textc{t} } \text{\textec{o\texto{y}}}\)] the virginal Spirit and it was she who praised him, for because of him she had come forth” (II 5:2-4; see also III 7:19-22, BG 27:14-17). So too, when Barbelo and the Spirit beget Christ/Autogenes, the offspring “glorified [\(\text{\texte{t} } \text{\textec{o\texto{y}}}\)] the holy Spirit and the perfect Providence because of whom he had come forth” (II 6:29-33; see also III 10:6-9, BG 31:1-4). Again, when the Mind is produced on Christ’s request, it “stood in attendance together with Christ, glorifying [\(\text{\texte{t} } \text{\textec{o\texto{y}}}\)] him and Barbelo” (III 10:12-14, BG 31:8-9, II 7:1-3) and—along with the Eternal Life, the Will of the Spirit, and Providence—“attended and glorified [\(\text{\texta{t} } \text{\textec{o\texto{y}}}\)] the invisible Spirit and Barbelo, since they had come into being because of her” (III 10:23-11:2, BG 31:19-32:3, II 7:11-15).

Upon his creation, the first, perfect Man

spoke and glorified and praised the invisible Spirit, saying, “It is because of you that [everything] has come into being, and it is to you that [everything] will return. I shall praise and glorify you and the Self-Generated [\(\text{\textpi\texta{t}o\text{\textg{e}n}{\text{h}}\text{n}\text{c}}\)] and the three aeons: the Father, the Mother, the Son, the perfect power.” (II 9:5-11; see also III 13:11-16, BG 35:13-20)

As each offspring piously defers to the authority of its creator, the proper social ordering of the upper realm is reaffirmed. The prominence of the motif of reproduction in constructing and reaffirming proper social order underlies Karen King’s interpretation of the ideal order as portraying a “patriarchal household: Father, Mother, and Son, with
numerous generations following from them in harmonious, hierarchical order.” While the divine realm in its entirety is ultimately authoritative, internally this realm is not at all an egalitarian system. Indeed, the patriarchal social hierarchy of the upper realm is thoroughly androcentric in relying on a masculinized system of authority in which masculinity is construed in terms of dominance and control.

This pattern of bestowing honours and reaffirming the hierarchical structure of the upper realm is ruptured by Sophia’s defiant act of reproduction without the consent of the Father or her masculine counterpart, and this act initiates the text’s second creation account, that is, the creation of the lower realm, as a “parody of this proper [superlunar] order.” Sophia’s generative act itself—indepenent feminine generation of a masculine offspring—is a direct inversion of the Monad’s primary reproductive act of independent masculine generation of a feminine offspring, Barbelo. Sophia conceives of Yaltabaoth, a fatherless bastard child who proceeds to produce various beings under his authority who, though modeled on superlunary perfection, are thoroughly deficient by

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104 King, The Secret Revelation of John, 523.
105 King, The Secret Revelation of John, 524.
106 The proper primary reproductive ordering of masculine creator to feminine offspring represented in the Monad’s generation of Barbelo and inverted in Sophia’s generation of Yaltabaoth is further naturalized in reference to Plato’s theorizing of how the primal numbers generate the rest of creation. Further, as we can see in Philo, these numbers are *gendered*, with odd numbers (i.e., one, the Monad, the primarily existent being) masculine and even numbers (i.e., secondarily created figures) feminine: “We may say that it is in its nature both male and female, and is a result of the distinctive power of either. For among things that are it is the odd that is male, and the even female” (Op. 13 [Colson and Whitaker, LCL]).
107 See II 12:25-13:1: These powers “have a firmament [ΟΥΣΤΕΡΕΩΜΑ] corresponding to each aeon-heaven. They were given names according to the glory of the heavenly ones [ΚΑΤΑ ΠΕΟΟΥ ΝΝΑΤΙΠΕ] for the [destruction of the] powers. … But the names which were given them according to the glory of the heavenly ones mean for them destruction and powerlessness [ΕΥΘΟΡΟΦ ΛΥΩ ΑΥΜΝΙΑΤΑΤΟΜ ΝΑΥ]. Thus they have two names. And everything he organized according to the model of the first aeons which had
comparison. Recalling again that masculinity is a scale of perfection, the inherent degeneracy or imperfection of the lower realm is what primarily characterizes this realm as effeminate. And the imperfection of Yaltabaoth and his realm is heavy-handed.

In marked contrast to the perfection of the upper realm, Yaltabaoth himself is characterized by deficiency, having imperfection as his first appellation: “[A] product came forth from her [Sophia] which was imperfect” (II 10:3-4; see also III 15:5-6, BG 37:13-14). As Sophia casts him away to reside in another place, he is both ontologically and actively distanced from the perfect, divine realm: “She [Sophia] cast him away from her, outside those places, that none of the immortal ones might see him” (BG 38:1-5, II 10:11-13; see also III 15:13-15). As the narrative continues, Yaltabaoth and his minions are repetitively characterized by ignorance and arrogance. For example, Yaltabaoth is “ignorant darkness [ΟΥΚΑΚΕ ΝΑΤΚΟΟΥΝΕ]” (II 11:10, IV 17:16-17); “he is impious [ΩΑΤΕ] in his arrogance [ΤΕΧΑΤΠΟΝΙΑ] which is in him” (II 11:18-19, IV 18:2-4); “he did not know the mystery which had come to pass through the holy decree” (II 24:2-3, IV 37:9-11; see also III 30:25-31:1, BG 61:12-15); “he showed his angels his ignorance [ΑΤΚΟΟΥΝ] which is in him” (II 24:4-6, IV 37:12-14; see also III 31:2-3, BG 61:16-18); “And Yaldabaath was full of ignorance [ΑΤΚΟΟΥΝ]” (II 24:12, IV 37:21-23; see also III 31:7-8, BG 62:5-6). Because of his ignorance, Yaltabaoth’s conduct is uncalculated, undisciplined, and never benevolent: He curses his creation (Adam and Eve/Epinoia) (III 30:22-23, BG 61:8-10, II 23:35-37, IV 37:4-6) and tries to punish humans by enslaving them to matter and mortality. These characterizations contrast
sharply with the conventional associations of masculinity with reason and virtue reflected
in the gendered construction of the upper realm.

Not only are the archons of the lower realm less than perfect (i.e., improperly
masculine) ontologically and in reference to their conduct, they are also less than
human.¹⁰⁸ Yaltabaoth is introduced with the following description:

And she saw him in her deliberation that he was taking on the form of another
likeness, having the face of a snake and the face of a lion. His eyes were shining
with fire. (BG 37:18-38:1; see also III 15:9-12, II 10:7-11)

A series of Yaltabaoth’s lower deities are similarly described as animal-faced:

The names of glory of those who are in command of the seven heavens are these:
the first is Yaoth, the lion-faced; the second is Eloaios, the donkey-faced; the third
is Astaphaios, the hyena-faced; the fourth is Yao, the serpent-faced with seven
heads; the fifth is Adonaios, the serpent-faced; the sixth is Adoni, the monkey-
faced; the seventh is Sabbataios, the shining flame of fire-faced. (BG 41:16-7; see
also III 17:20-6, II 11:26-34, IV 18:17-23)

In their animal-human hybridity, Yaltabaoth and his archons are analogous to the hybrid
monstrosity associated with hermaphroditism in Brisson’s research, and as explored
previously. Although the theological system of the archons mimics the deities of the
upper realm, rather than extending the scale of human perfection into a divine hierarchy,

¹⁰⁸ See Mary Midgley, Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature (London and New
York: Routledge, [1979] 1995), 24-48 on how non-human animals are used discursively and symbolically as Others against which to construct ideologies concerning human nature, virtue, and morality. Midgley provides an example of such use of non-human animals from Plato: “[Our unnecessary pleasures and appetites] that are awakened in sleep when the rest of the soul, the rational, gentle and dominant part, slumbers, but the beastly and savage part, replete with food and wine, gambols and, repelling sleep, endeavours to sally forth and satisfy its own instincts. You are aware that in such a case there is nothing it will not venture to undertake as being released from all sense of shame and all reason. It does not shrink from attempting to lie with a mother in fancy or with anyone else, man, god or brute. It is ready for any foul deed of blood; it abstains from no food, and, in a word, falls short of no extreme of folly and shamelessness” (Republic, IX 571c-d [Shorey, LCL]. See also Stephen T. Newmyer, “Being the One and Becoming the Other: Animals in Ancient Philosophical Schools,” in The Oxford Handbook of Animals in Classical Thought and Life, ed. Gordon Lindsay Campbell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 507-534 on the discursive use of non-human animals in Greek philosophy.
these lower deities extend the other end of this scale below humans themselves.\textsuperscript{109} In so doing, the Platonic dualism on which the oppositional logic of \textit{Apocryphon of John} relies is further exaggerated.

Further to this point, the mimesis that we expect to establish continuity between the model/creator and copy/offspring is not actualized in the theogony and cosmogony of the lower realm. First, Yaltabaoth does not, as do the offspring of the upper realm, resemble his mother, but is dissimilar to her likeness and has another form (II 10:6-7, BG 37:16-18, III 15:8-9). If we recall the notion present in \textit{Timaeus’} account of procreation that form (compared to the father) arises in formless, quality-less matter (compared to the mother), then Yaltabaoth’s dissimilar appearance is a direct result of his fatherless, formless conception.\textsuperscript{110} Indeed, Codex III explicitly states as much:

\begin{quote}
And her product came out imperfect [\textit{ATELECTON}, \textit{not having form in her form} [\textit{EMNTH MOPHN 2N TESMOPHN}], because she had made him without her consort. (III 15:5-8)
\end{quote}

Where Yaltabaoth does mimic his mother is, somewhat ironically, in his own ignorant generative activity; just as Sophia creates Yaltabaoth out of ignorance, Yaltabaoth creates the corporeal world out of ignorance. It is worth noting, however, that Sophia’s ignorance actually sets her apart from the divine realm,\textsuperscript{111} so I doubt whether this similarly between

\textsuperscript{109} It is possible that this characterization of the lower deities as animal-human hybrids is also critiquing traditional Egyptian deities as similarly barbarous. In the least, it is likely that animal-human hybrid deities, and perhaps the association of these deities with barbarity, are an easily accessible cultural motif in \textit{Apocryphon of John’s} socio-historical context. Additionally, the names of these deities are derived from various Hebrew names for God. It seems that \textit{Apocryphon of John} combines in this passage a critique of both Egyptian deities and the Jewish god in a brilliant moment of cultural synthesis.


\textsuperscript{111} Even in his merciful restoration of Sophia, the Monad does not yet allow Sophia to return to her own aeon until she has corrected her deficiency (III 21:11-15, BG 47:8-13, II 14:9-13).
mother and offspring serves to establish Yaltabaoth’s continuity with the divine realm as it normally functions and exists. The motif of mimesis and the corollary assumption of at least a slightly degenerate creation is elaborated in this narrative and used to alienate the copy/creation/lower realm from the model/creator/upper realm.

Mimesis, and more specifically, the motifs of generation or reproduction, also display this marked contrast between the upper and lower realms. As I outlined previously in this chapter, reproduction in the upper realm is accomplished through thought: The Father’s thought became substantivized (τεχνοια ἀγωγητικά νοστιμού [II 4:27, IV 7:1-2], αὐτεχνοια ὁ νοστιμού [BG 27:5, III 7:12]), producing Barbelo; Barbelo (i.e., forethought) conceives of Christ by exchanging glances with the Father; the first, perfect Man is generated “from the foreknowledge [τιτιγνωσις] of the perfect mind [πνοικα]” (II 8:28-29; see also III 12:24-25, BG 34:19-20); and even Yaltabaoth is produced by Sophia’s conceiving of a thought from herself (III 15:4-6, BG 37:12-14, II 10:1-4). The ideal, asexual reproduction of the upper realm is not unexpected in light of the equivocation of primal undifferentiation and asexual masculinity apparent in other ancient Greco-Roman texts such as, for example, Philo’s exegesis of Genesis.112

By contrast, Yaltabaoth conceives his archons by copulating with his arrogance (BG 39:4-6) or ignorance (III 16:7-8). Further, he and his archons subsequently proceed to procreate through violence and deception.113 Yaltabaoth rapes Eve, the archons deceptively change their appearances to those of the daughters of men’s husbands (III 38:21-24, BG 74:11-16, II 29:26-29, IV 45:27-46:2) in order to procreate with these

113 See King, The Secret Revelation of John, 524-525.
women, and the archons beget “children out of the darkness [πάκη] by means of their counterfeit [in Codices III, BG only] spirit” (III 39:5-8, BG 75:4-7, II 30:7-9, IV 46:17-19).\textsuperscript{114} As King summarizes, “reproduction in the divine realm is characterized by acts of mental will and spiritual self-recognition in contrast to the violent acts of lustful desire and deceit by the lower world’s rulers.”\textsuperscript{115}

The archons’ reproduction is not only deviant in comparison to the upper realm; it is also a failure. As King outlines, Yaltabaoth seeks to plant “sexual desire [ουςπόρα νεπτιγμία] in her who belongs to Adam” and produce “through intercourse the copies of the bodies, and [inspire] them with his counterfeit [ἐτυββίαιτ or πεγαντίμιμον] spirit” (II 24:28-31; see also III 31:23-32:3, BG 63:5-9, IV 38:16-21), thus creating his own lineage and enslaving these people in ignorance and darkness. But Adam and Eve do not reproduce through desire; instead, Adam recognizes the “likeness of his own foreknowledge” in Eve (i.e., Epinoia) and begets his son Seth in “the likeness of the son of man” and “according to the way of the [generation] [τένεα] in the aeons” (II 24:35-25:2; see also III 32:6-9, BG 63:12-16, IV, 38:25-30), therefore continuing not Yaltabaoth’s lineage, but the divine lineage of the upper realm. Further, the reader is promised earlier in the text that the deficiency caused by Sophia’s improper conception of Yaltabaoth will be remedied and proper order restored; thus, as King points out, Yaltabaoth’s failure is no surprise.\textsuperscript{116} Indeed, it is in

\textsuperscript{114} Similar narratives of angelic descent and illicit intercourse, reproduction, and instruction are seen in, for example, the Book of the Watchers (1 En. 6-11), Genesis (Gen. 6:1-4), and Jubilees (Jub. 4:21-22). See Annette Yoshiko Reed, Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) for a detailed examination of this motif.

\textsuperscript{115} King, The Secret Revelation of John, 525.

\textsuperscript{116} King, The Secret Revelation of John, 526.
Adam’s self-recognition of his essence in Eve (i.e., Epinoia) and his proper origin and lineage in the superlunar hierarchy that the deficiency is remedied:

[The Father] sent […] a helper to Adam, a luminous reflection [ὉΥΕΤΙΝΟΙΑ] who comes out of him, who is called ‘Life’. And she assists the whole creature by toiling with him, and by restoring him to his perfection and by teaching him about the descent of his seed […] And the Reflection [ΤΕΠΙΝΟΙΑ] of the light was hidden in Adam, in order that the rulers [ΝΑΡΧΩΝ] might not know (her), but that Reflection [ΤΕΠΙΝΟΙΑ] might be a correction of the deficiency [ὬΤΑ or ΖΥΣΤΕΡΗΜΑ] of the Mother. (II 20:14-28; see also III 25:6-23, BG 53:4-54:4; IV 31:15-26)

And he (Adam) saw the woman beside him. And in that moment luminous Reflection appeared […] And he recognized his counter-image [ΤΕΦΕΙΝΕ or ΤΕΦΟΥΣΙΛ], and he said, “This is indeed bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” Therefore the man will leave his father and his mother and he will cleave to his wife and they will both become one flesh. For his consort will be sent to him, and he will leave his father and his mother. (II 23:4-19; see also III 30:1-12; BG 59:20-60:14, IV 35:25-36:11)

Adam and Eve’s mimesis of superlunar procreation serves to affirm the proper place of Adam and his lineage in the upper realm; it is not to Yaltabaoth’s authority which Adam ought to defer, nor to which he does, but to the authority of the Father-Mother-Son, the god-head of the upper realm.

Although I have previously outlined some characterizations of Yaltabaoth and the archons as effeminate, the emasculation of the divine beings of the lower realm is most pronounced by their various social relations such as the one described above. If gender is conceptualized as a system by which social relations are managed and mapped onto bodies, then this point should come as no surprise. As it turns out, the “oppositional logic”\textsuperscript{117} of the text seems primarily concerned with emasculating the gods of the lower realm in order to assert the masculinity, that is, the dominance, of the upper realm and the lineage traced back to this realm. The domination of the archons of the lower realm by

\textsuperscript{117}King, The Secret Revelation of John, 528.
masculine superlunar figures, either as the masculine counterparts of androgynous pairings (such as the Father or Christ) or as genderless masculine figures (such as the all-encompassing, perfect virginal Spirit), is not unexpected.

Where the archons’ emasculation becomes more interesting, to my mind, is in their domination by numerous feminine characters: Sophia, Pronoia, Epinoia, Eve. Indeed, as King explains, each of Yaltabaoth’s attempts at dominating humanity is impeded by “Pronoia and her agents (Epinoia, Christ, and Eve).”\(^{118}\) For example, Sophia intercedes to correct the deficiency caused by Yaltabaoth's birth; Sophia deceives Yaltabaoth into breathing her power into Adam, causing Adam to be superior to his supposed Father, Yaltabaoth; Epinoia hides inside of Adam and reveals to him his proper lineage, thus usurping Yaltabaoth’s claim to Adam's future generations; Yaltabaoth's rape of Eve “showed his angels his ignorance which is in him” (II 24:5-6; see also III 31:2-3, BG 61:16-19, IV 37:12-14); and Pronoia sends someone to snatch “life out of Eve” before Yaltabaoth can impregnate her and generate his lineage (II 24:13-15). As King aptly points out, the impact of the feminine characters’ emasculation of the archons relies on a gender hierarchy in which masculinity/maleness/males are normatively placed above femininity/femaleness/females and “the social logic relies on a normative gendered reading of honor and shame, in which honor is stratified by gender as well as by status (slave or free, ruler or subject, and so on).”\(^{119}\)

The femininity of these dominating beings is more challenging to deal with in relation to King’s argument that the norm on which the emasculation of the archons relies

\(^{118}\) King, *The Secret Revelation of John*, 533.

is “cited precisely in order to critique the violence of ‘masculinized’ domination.”\textsuperscript{120} The issue arising from this implication becomes clearer by considering an example from the text. In elaborating on this claim, King focuses particularly on the implications of considering “Eve’s disobedience as an imitation of Sophia.”\textsuperscript{121} While Sophia’s disobedience toward her Father in her deviant and disastrous act of procreation might serve as a cautionary tale against the disruption of patriarchal (or, more broadly, heteronormative) order and thus work to reaffirm this very order, Eve’s disobedience toward her supposed father, Yaltabaoth, is a “heroizing…act of superior wisdom”\textsuperscript{122} and is a key component of the salvation narrative of the text. King argues that the oppositional logic of the text allows for the possibility of a reading of Sophia’s independence and defiance of the Father’s and her masculine counterpart’s authority as similarly positive: If Eve’s act of disobedience is an imitation of Sophia’s, then could not Sophia’s defiant actions be similarly read as a positive critique of the masculinized, hierarchical social order of the upper realm?\textsuperscript{123} King offers compelling evidence to suggest that the possibility that the Sophia-Eve parallel could be read as censuring masculine domination in general was indeed recognized by ancient audiences; most notably, she explains how Eve/Epinoia’s superiority (on the basis of her wisdom) is deemphasized in Codex II in comparison to the Berlin Codex\textsuperscript{124} presumably to preclude such an interpretation.

\textsuperscript{120} King, \textit{The Secret Revelation of John}, 533.
\textsuperscript{121} King, \textit{The Secret Revelation of John}, 534.
\textsuperscript{122} King, \textit{The Secret Revelation of John}, 533.
\textsuperscript{123} Indeed, there is a certain irony in Sophia’s—literally, Wisdom’s—apparently playing the fool in this text.
\textsuperscript{124} King, \textit{The Secret Revelation of John}, 534.
I question, however, how such an interpretation can be reconciled with the text’s overemphasis on proper social order as a key characteristic of idealized, primal, utopian perfection. It seems to me that the censuring of masculine domination in the character of Eve/Epinoia serves to reaffirm the superiority of the genderless order of the upper realm, insofar as a genderless social order is understood as an uncontested masculine order. Certainly, the *femininity* of these entities is particularly expedient and the presence of feminine appellations and qualities in the midst of the undifferentiated masculinity of the upper realm can be explained in reference to its narrative usefulness. Even while the divine beings of the upper realm are characterized by unity in being encompassed by the perfect, virginal Spirit, the masculine-feminine gender identities of these figures are relative. For example, while the masculine virtues of figures like Sophia and Barbelo function rhetorically to assert their superiority over the degenerate, effeminate archons of the lower realm, their femininity accomplishes a different kind of work: As mothers, daughters, and feminine entities, Sophia and Barbelo are subordinated to the Father.\footnote{A similar exercise of feminine/female power within a tightly controlled framework is apparent in the privileges afforded to female priestly officeholders in Greco-Roman antiquity. Women priests can acquire social, political, and economic capital, but these privileges and the power exercised by these women are afforded by virtue of their office or class rather than their gender/sex. In this way, the elevation of particular women does not undermine contemporary hierarchical social and ideological systems, but instead works within and reinforces these hierarchies. See Joan Breton Connelly, *Portrait of a Priestess: Women and Ritual in Ancient Greece* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 197-221, 275-281.}

Along the same lines, Conway provides\footnote{Conway, *Behold the Man*, 51-52.} a compelling illustration of the relativity of gender identity from Philo’s discussion of Sophia in *On Flight and Finding*:

> While Wisdom’s [Sophia’s] name is feminine, her nature is masculine. For all the virtues have women’s titles, but powers and activities of perfect men [*αὐδρων τελειότατον*]. For that which comes after God, even if it were chiefest of all other
things, occupies a second place, and therefore was termed feminine to express its contrast with the Maker of the Universe, who is masculine, and its affinity to everything else. For the feminine always falls short and is inferior to the masculine, which has priority. (Fug. 51-52 [Colson and Whitaker, LCL])

In his own analysis of Philo’s Wisdom, Shäfer explains Sophia’s ambiguous gender expressed in this passage in reference to a distinction between this figure’s ontology and function. Shäfer suggests that in her essence (i.e., her relationship with God), Sophia is feminine and passive. In her function in the material world, Sophia is masculine and active.\(^\text{127}\) Shäfer further argues that it is precisely Sophia’s gender ambiguity that makes her such a useful figure (and more useful than the definitively masculine Logos) in negotiating the relationship between God and both the divine and corporeal cosmos. He references the following passage as the culmination of Philo’s theorizing of Sophia:

> Let us, then, pay no heed to the discrepancy in the gender of the words, and say that the daughter of God [δύνατέρα τοῦ θεοῦ], even Wisdom [σοφίαν], is not only masculine but father [ἄρρητα τε καὶ πατέρα εἶναι], sowing and begetting in souls aptness to learn, discipline, knowledge, sound sense, good and laudable actions. It is from this household that Jacob the Practiser seeks to win a bride [γάμον]. To what other place than to the house of wisdom [σοφίας] shall he go to find a partner, a faultless judgement, with whom to spend his days for ever? (Fug. 52 [Colson and Whitaker])

Shäfer summarizes Philo’s Sophia in the following:

> Wisdom is simultaneously mother and spouse, daughter and father, female and male. As God’s spouse and Israel’s mother, she is female; as God’s daughter, she is paradoxically male, insofar as she takes over God’s creative activity, implementing in human souls his divine gifts. And, finally, as man’s companion she is female again: Jacob marries her as the embodiment of ‘faultless judgement,’ to accompany him all his life.\(^\text{128}\)

Further, I suggest that the interpretation that Eve/Epinoia’s actions censure the social order of the lower realm to promote the superiority of the uncontested order of the

\(^\text{127}\) We can here recall Parker and Walters’ teratogenic grid, which positions maleness with activity and femaleness with passivity.

upper realm more completely reconciles both the unity (i.e., genderless masculinity) and androgyny (i.e., masculinity-femininity) of the upper realm; androgyny affirms the hierarchal social order that places masculinity above femininity while unity constructs this order as entirely incontestable. The god-head of the upper realm is thus constructed as an unconquerable, ultra-masculine masculine-feminine entity. It is helpful to recall here the description of Barbelo, the Monad’s primary emanation, as “the thrice-male [my emphasis], the thrice-powerful, the thrice-named, the thrice-begotten (BG 27:21-28:2; see also III 8:1-3, II 5:8-9, IV 7:22-23). It follows, then, that the masculinized social order of the lower realm is only censured because a more perfect, proper order exists elsewhere. Indeed, the effeminate androgyny of the archons in Apocryphon of John is primarily useful in subordinating them to the beings of the upper realm. As with the femininity of various divine superlunar entities in this text, the effeminacy of these figures is explained by its rhetorical utility. Yaltabaoth and his minions act in imitation of the upper realm, but fail at every turn and are variously characterized as barbarously masculine, degenerately feminine, and bestially androgynous. The social order of the lower realm is denounced on the grounds of being a parody of proper social order; it is a deficient sham created from the disruption of this perfect social order.

While a nuanced consideration of the allegorical possibilities of this text is beyond the scope of this analysis, it is worth noting that the social and natural world from which this text was produced and variously redacted and interpreted—and, of course, the same world we live in today—is indeed one of change, differentiation, violence, oppression, and death. It is possible to imagine that just as the emasculation of the archons

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129 Recalling again Philo’s explication of odd numbers as masculine and even numbers as feminine (Op. 13), thrice-male might also function superlatively according to this system.
masculinizes and affirms the authority of the superlunar god-head, so also do the painful conditions of human existence afford credibility to the superiority of a utopian social order to which human salvation is oriented (as a return to superlunar perfection and a restoration of the proper divine lineage of the generation of the perfect Man). The oppositional logic of *Apocryphon of John*, which exaggerates the gulf between the divine and sublunar realms by using oppositional gendered imagery, thus makes sense of the imperfection of everyday life and offers a solution to this disordered existence. By explaining the disorder and degeneracy of the human world as solely the responsibility of an effeminate, illegitimate ruler and his archons, the transcendent deity is exonerated from wrongdoing and hope for restoration is supplied in a context in which humans feel helpless to change their present conditions. Indeed, because the ruling hierarchy of the corporeal world is so denigrated, we should expect no better; the degeneracy of the human world is explained by the logic that creation mimics the form of its father, who in this case, is deformed and depraved. On the other hand, the supreme authority and legitimacy of the upper realm built upon normative constructions of gender that position masculinity alongside hierarchies of perfection, domination, control, and virtue promises relief. Present suffering and oppression under the tyranny of the corporeal world’s archons is temporary; humans can achieve self-actualization of their divine origin through Christ’s revelation and return properly to a social order far removed from their present social disorder.

Further, this depiction of opposition between the imperfect world in which humans are presently situated and the perfect world to which we properly belong allows the text to construct a world in which the insiders of the text are rightly dominated by God (in
order to affirm his authority) while in turn reversing the domination presently characterizing their world by emasculating their worldly rulers. Regarding the former effect, restoration of the immovable generation to the divine world occurs as both self-recognition of the divine essence of humans as well as recognition of divine authority. For example, where the mythic narrative of Noah and the flood is integrated into the text, Noah and members of the immovable generation “[shelter] themselves with a luminous cloud” (III 38:4-5, BG 73:11-12; see also II 29:11-12, IV 45:8-9) and recognize the divine lordship (\textit{tm\texttildelow t\texttildelow xoic} [III 38:5-6], \textit{teqm\texttildelow t\texttildelow xoic} [BG 73:13]) or authority (\textit{te\texttildelow a\texttildelow ye\texttildelow n\texttildelow te\texttildelow ia} [II 29:12, IV 45:9-10]). Just as each divine emanation defers to the authority of its creator, so do humans in their restoration to their divine family. As I have explained previously, Yaltabaoth and the archons’ authority is usurped through this salvation narrative, with the products of their generative labour being properly claimed by the deities of the upper realm. The text is also heavy-handed in underscoring the inferiority of the archons against their human offspring: The first man’s “intelligence [\textit{teqm\texttildelow nt\texttildelow c\texttildelow abe}] was greater than (that of) all of them, and greater than (that of) the Chief Ruler [\textit{pe\texttildelow pro\texttildelow ta\texttildelow p\texttildelow x\texttildelow o\texttildelow n}]” (BG 52:8-11, II 20:3-5, IV 30:23-26; see also III 24:17-20), and he is “superior to them [\textit{ak\texttildelow x\texttildelow ice\texttildelow \texttildelow no\texttildelow yo\texttildelow e\texttildelow po\texttildelow y}]” (BG 54:9-11; see also III 26:5-6). The archons are emasculated in comparison to their more perfectly characterized offspring.

In direct contradiction to the conventional designation of so-called gnostic texts as characterized by anti-cosmic dualism, the solution to worldly deficiency and disorder offered in \textit{Apocryphon of John} is not disconnected from the present human condition. Rather, the proper, divine lineage of the perfect generation of Man is carried forward in
every act of reproduction modeled after that of the Father-Mother-Son and Adam-Eve-
Seth, reproduction initiated not by sexual desire but in self-recognition of a shared
superlunar essence and origin. In this way, while salvation and reception into “eternal
imperishable life” (BG 66:7, II 26:2-3, IV 40:14-16; see also III 33:19-20) is a *future*
expectation, all humans are filled with the power of the spirit, “for without it they would
not be able to stand” (III 34:8-9, BG 67:6-7; see also 26:14, IV 40:30-32). It is this power
that allows humans to live a good life free of evil (III 34:6, BG 67:1-4, II 26:10-12, IV
40:25-28) for this spirit is stronger than the counterfeit spirit of Yaltabaoth (III 34:21-
35:1, BG 68:4-11, II 26:26-32, IV 41:14-20). Even those who have been led astray by the
counterfeit spirit and cast into forgetfulness will be “saved from forgetfulness” and
“[acquire] knowledge” (BG 69:11-12; see also III 35:15-17, II 27:9-10, IV 42:7-9).
Salvation is only refused to those who “did know (but) have turned away” (BG 70:10, II
27:22-23, IV 42:24-26; see also III 36:5-6); these will be “tortured with eternal
punishment” (BG 69:18-71:2; see also III 36:12-15, II 27:29-30; IV 43:3-4). *Apocryphon
of John*’s cosmogony establishes the constant superlunar presence in the corporeal world
(within each human soul) while the epistemological dimension of the text’s salvation
narrative positions the acceptance of Christ’s revelation, recorded in *Apocryphon of John*,
as necessary to future emancipation from the disorder of everyday life.
4. Conclusion

The primary objective of this analysis of *Apocryphon of John* has been quite simply to make sense of this complex and, at times, seemingly bizarre text. To do so, I have read the text through two different analytic frameworks that make *Apocryphon of John* intelligible: (Middle) Platonism and gender. In chapter 2, I looked at the text as a piece of scholarly literature in the tradition of Middle Platonism and outlined how *Apocryphon of John* is in continuity with the ideological content and rhetorical strategies of philosophical literature contemporary with the dating of the text. Rather than conforming to classificatory systems and analytic frameworks by which *Apocryphon of John* is examined exclusively as a (heretically) Christian artefact, I assume *Apocryphon of John* to be in line with scholarly rhetorical strategies of its day that integrate a broad variety of ideological content related to, for example, philosophy, astrology, politics, economics, history, ritual, and domestic life. In the case of this text, *Apocryphon of John* draws primarily on Platonizing philosophy (my chosen focus) and Jewish literary traditions. In chapter 3, I examined *Apocryphon of John* as a gendered piece of literature. In this analysis, I focused on how gender rhetoric is employed strategically in the text to particular narrative effects. Through comparative analysis with gendered rhetoric and polemics, this gender-based analysis similarly establishes continuity between the gender play of *Apocryphon of John* and other contemporary gendered literature.

Each analysis shows how *Apocryphon of John* sets up an oppositional narrative framework that positions the authority and hierarchy of the divine realm as utterly superior to that of the corporeal world. As outlined in chapter 2, *Apocryphon of John* exaggerates Platonic dualism and the inherent valuation of the divine cosmos over the
material cosmos through a number of rhetorical moves. The text positions an extremely transcendent (Middle) Platonic deity as head of the divine cosmos and a degenerate, malevolent deity as creator and ruler of the material cosmos. The entities by which the divine cosmos is constituted (the Platonic Model) are impossibly perfect, while the material world (the Platonic Copy) is characterized by deception, disorder, and decay. Humans properly belong to the divine realm (evidenced by Sophia’s power bringing life to the material Adam), but because their corporeality reflects the degeneracy of their creator, it irrevocably alienates them from this self-actualization. Thus, divine intervention is required to restore humans to their perfection (in mimesis of the divine). As I show in my gender-based analysis of Apocryphon of John, the text characterizes the deities of the upper realm by superhuman, incorporeal, masculine perfection while Yaltabaoth and his minions are described as effeminate, degenerate, and bestial. The social hierarchy of the divine realm is continually reaffirmed through mimesis, while the hierarchy of the lower realm is ultimately overturned and the archons emasculated by Adam’s recognition of his true divine essence through the intervention of feminine entities of the upper realm.

The separation of two of Apocryphon of John’s interpretive strategies—one based in Platonic ideology and the other in gender—is an analytic move I have made in the interest of examining the narrative of this text. This methodological strategy has highlighted how each mode of analysis enhances the reading of the text according to the other analytic framework. On the one hand, the consideration of gender play brings attention to the strategies underlying the integration of Platonic ideology and the narrative effect of this integration of material. At the same time, analysis of the Platonic ideology
upon which the text is constructed makes the ambiguous and complicated gendered rhetoric of *Apocryphon of John* intelligible.

In the text itself, however, gender and Platonism are intertwined and mutually supportive. When we minimize the distance between Platonism and gender, it becomes clear these motifs are employed to a common end in *Apocryphon of John*. For instance, the most pertinent narrative feature of the text—the oppositional logic that positions one hierarchy of authority over another—is made intelligible by comparison to dualistic (Middle) Platonic ideology and the associated separation of the god-head’s creative entity (i.e., the demiurge) and motif of mimesis. The exaggeration of these ideological constructions made apparent in my comparative analysis of *Apocryphon of John* and contemporary philosophical literature is further elaborated and accomplished through the integration of conventional gender constructions and rhetorical usages of gender. Unifying the two streams of analysis of *Apocryphon of John* I have explored in this project provides a more nuanced and persuasive reading of the text.

Further, my methodological focus on rhetorical representations and usages of gender in *Apocryphon of John* provides an alternative to, or at least mediates, the too quick assumption of early approaches to Nag Hammadi literature, and more broadly, so-called gnostic literature, that see women’s liberation behind these texts. More specifically, these approaches assume the prominence of feminine entities and imagery to be indicative of the presence of women and female leaders in the communities behind the production and reception of such texts.\(^{130}\) By contrast, I have shown that *Apocryphon of  

\(^{130}\) For example, see Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, [1979] 1981), 57-83; Elizabeth Castelli, “‘I Will Make Mary Male’: Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity,” in *Body Guards:*
*John* is ambiguous and inconsistent in its representation of gender, with variation existing even between the various manuscripts. Barbelo, Pronoia, and Epinoia are exemplars of feminine deities, existing in the likeness of the supreme, transcendent Monad. Epinoia/Eve is a saviour figure aiding in human self-actualization. At the same time, the disorder of the lower realm is a direct result of feminine disobedience in Sophia’s independent generation of Yaltabaoth.

What we can conclude with confidence from my analysis of *Apocryphon of John* is that gender is used rhetorically to accomplish a great variety of intellectual work. Most prominently, *Apocryphon of John* deploys masculinizing rhetoric to describe the deities of the upper realm while characterizing the sublunar realms’ archons as effeminate and degenerate. Likewise, the feminine entities of the divine realm, who seem to be the most gender fluid in their functions and appellations, variously dominate the archons of the lower realm and exist to bolster the authority of the (masculine) Monad. Focusing on this rhetorical usefulness of gender provides an *explanation* for the appearance of both femininity and masculinity in texts like *Apocryphon of John*. And in this regard, we need not assume the text reflects any lived reality of female leadership; rather, femininity is integrated because it serves distinct *rhetorical* purposes in the text.

In this suggestion, I do not mean to write women out of a textual tradition, as has so often been done in scholarship. Nor do I wish to suggest we disregard entirely those interpretations oriented toward deciphering how these texts impact and are shaped by the

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socio-historical realities of women in Greco-Roman antiquity. Rather, I mean to propose that the question of how gender in literature relates to gender in lived reality is much more complex than has often been assumed in scholarship.\textsuperscript{131} The disconnect between the discursive utility of gendered imagery and entities and gender as it plays out in the lives of real people points to a broader complexity in scholarship in managing the relationship between what people are doing and what their ideological systems, which we can access through texts and artifacts that survive to our day, say they are doing. As I have shown repeatedly in my gender-based analysis of \textit{Apocryphon of John}, gender is good to think with, and it is this rhetorical utility that is a useful point of departure in analysis.

Bibliography


