METRODORUS OF LAMPSACUS AND THE PROBLEM OF ALLEGORY: AN EXTREME CASE?

DAVID J. CALIFF

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Diogenes 2.11 (DK 61 A2):

> Δοκεῖ δὲ πρῶτος, καθά φησι Φαβωρῖνος ἐν Παντοδαπῇ ἱστορίαι τὴν Ὁμήρου ποίησιν ἀποφήνασθαι εἶναι περὶ ἀρετῆς καὶ δικαιοσύνης· ἐπὶ πλεῖον δὲ προστῆναι τοῦ λόγου Μητρόδωρον τὸν Λαμψακηνόν γνώριμον ὄντα αὐτοῦ, ὃν καὶ πρῶτον σπουδάσαι τοῦ ποιητοῦ περὶ τὴν φυσικὴν πραγματείαν.
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> Favorinus says in his *Miscellaneous History* that [Anaxagoras] was the first to show that the poetry of Homer is about virtue and justice, and that his acquaintance Metrodorus of Lampsacus defended this principle more extensively and was the first to study the poet's physical doctrine.[1]

Tatian *ad Graecos* 21 (DK 61 A3):

> Καὶ Μητρόδωρος δὲ ὁ Λαμψακηνὸς ἐν τῶι Περὶ Ὁμήρου λίαν εὐήθως διείλεκται πάντα εἰς ἀλληγορίαν μετάγων. οὔτε γὰρ Ἥραν οὔτε Ἀθηνᾶν οὔτε Δία τοῦτ' εἶναί

1 All translations are the author's.

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> φησιν ὅπερ οἱ τοὺς περιβόλους αὐτοῖς καὶ τεμένη καθιδρύσαντες νομίζουσιν, φύσεως δὲ ὑποστάσεις καὶ στοιχείων διακοσμήσεις. καὶ τὸν Ἕκτορα δὲ καὶ τὸν Ἀχιλλέα δηλαδὴ καὶ Ἀγαμέμνονα καὶ πάντας ἁπαξαπλῶς Ἕλληνάς τε καὶ βαρβάρους σὺν τῆι Ἑλένηι καὶ τῶι Πάριδι τῆς αὐτῆς φύσεως ὑπάρχοντας χάριν οἰκονομίας ἐρεῖτε παρεισῆχθαι οὐδενὸς ὄντος τῶν προειρημένων ἀνθρώπων.
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> And Metrodorus of Lampsacus, in his treatise *About Homer,* reasoning very foolishly, turns everything into allegory. For neither Hera nor Athena nor Zeus are that which people think they are when they establish the sacred precincts, but are the substances of nature and arrangements of the elements. And clearly Hector and Achilles and Agamemnon and all the Greeks in general and the barbarians, too, and Helen and Paris partake of the same nature, and, for the sake of the economy of the poem, they are introduced despite the fact that none of the aforementioned heroes actually exists.

Hesychius (DK 61 A4), Philodemus:[2]

> HESYCHIUS: Ἀγαμέμνονα τὸν αἰθέρα Μητρόδωρος εἶπεν ἀλληγορικῶς.
> PHILODEMUS: ἔνιοι δὲ καὶ φανερῶς μαίνονται, καθάπερ οἱ τὰς δύο ποήσεις Ὁμήρου περὶ τε τοῦ κόσμου λέγοντες πεποιῆσθαι μερῶν καὶ περὶ νόμων καὶ ἐθισμῶν τῶν παρ᾽ ἀνθρώποις, καὶ τὸν Ἀγαμέμνονα μὲν αἰθέρα εἶναι, τὸν Ἀχιλλέα δ᾽ ἥλιον, τὴν Ἑλένην δὲ γῆν καὶ τὸν Ἀλέχανδρον ἀέρα, τὸν Ἕκτορα δὲ σελήνην καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ἀναλόγως ὠνομάσθαι τούτοις. τῶν δὲ θεῶν τὴν Δήμητρα μὲν ἦπαρ, τὸν Διόνυσον δὲ σπλῆνα, τὸν Ἀπόλλω δὲ χολήν.
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> HESYCHIUS: Metrodorus says allegorically that Agamemnon is the aether.

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2 Philodemus *On Poems* 2 = *P. Herc.* 1676 fr. 2.20ff. = DK 61 A 4.

> PHILODEMUS: But some are plainly mad, like those who say that the two poems of Homer were composed about the elements of the universe and about the laws and customs among men, and that Agamemnon is the aether, Achilles the sun, Helen the earth, and Alexandros the air, Hector the moon, and analogously with the names of all the others. And of the gods, Demeter is the liver, Dionysius the spleen, and Apollo the bile.

Plato *Ion* 530C (DK 61 A1):

> ION: οἶμαι κάλλιστα ἀνθρώπων λέγειν περὶ Ὁμήρου, ὡς οὔτε Μητρόδωρος ὁ Λαμψακηνὸς οὔτε Στησίμβροτος ὁ θάσιος οὔτε Γλαύκων οὔτε ἄλλος οὐδεὶς τῶν πώποτε γενομένων ἔσχεν εἰπεῖν οὕτω πολλὰς καὶ καλὰς διανοίας περὶ Ὁμήρου ὅσας ἐγώ.
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> ION: And I think that I talk about Homer better than other men, for neither Metrodorus of Lampsacus nor Stesimbrotus of Thasos nor Glaucon (nor anyone else ever) has spoken so many and such excellent thoughts about Homer as I have.

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Oddly enough, the renewed interest in ancient literary criticism has not yet extended in any serious way to Metrodorus of Lampsacus, a fifth-century allegorical interpreter of Homer and disciple of Anaxagoras. While Metrodorus has received a few passing comments during the last decade (notably Lamberton and Keaney 1992), and while he earned three full pages in Nicholas Richardson's landmark essay on "Homeric Professors in the Age of the Sophists" (1975.68–70), and four in Richard Janko's recent paper (1997.76–79) on the authorship of the Derveni papyrus—not Metrodorus!—it has been over ninety years since Wilhelm Nestle devoted an entire article to the ideas of this most peculiar of Homer's ancient readers.[3] Indeed, our Metrodorus is even in danger of being eclipsed by the so-called lesser Metrodorus of Lampsacus, the Epicurean, about whom there was a brief

3 Nestle 1907.503–10. Also useful is Buffière 1956.125–32.

exchange in the Naples-based *Bolletino del Centro Internazionale per lo Studio dei Papiri ercolanesi*.[4]

The reasons for such relative neglect are not difficult to identify. As Eduard Zeller tersely put it, Metrodorus was "a man of no great originality" (1928.231) who "showed the worst possible taste in carrying to the extreme point the allegorical interpretation of Homer which had been undertaken by Theagenes of Rhegium in the sixth century in reply to the attacks of Xenophanes" (71). Gomperz's critique was even more scathing: "His allegorizing interpretation of Homer disgusts us above all for its wild fancy" (1896.304).[5] Even Nestle accused him of carrying his allegorical interpretations to the point of *geschmacklose Absurdität* (1908.50).

Whatever one's aesthetic judgment about the "tastefulness" of Metrodorus's allegorical identifications, his *method* of allegorical interpretation does fit into an identifiable tradition. Indeed, his position on the fringe of respectability may prove especially useful when attempting to define the parameters of the tradition that he both takes part in and strains. The task of this brief essay, then, will be threefold: to recover, as much as possible, Metrodorus's interpretations of the *Iliad*; to explain how his ideas fit into an emerging interpretive tradition; and to explore what, if any, insights about the workings of allegory can be gained from his fanciful readings.

To begin, the term "allegory" requires some clarification because

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4 See Spinelli 1986 and Tepedino Guerra 1992.

5 The first volume of *Griechische Denker* appeared in 1896, but eight years earlier Gomperz offered a somewhat milder opinion of Metrodorus: "Allein ein Gegenstand von weit tieferem Interesse ist die klarere Einsicht, die wir nunmehr in das allegorische System des Metrodoros von Lampsakos, des Schülers des Anaxagoras, gewinnen mittelst des f. 90, welches sich—mit Ausnahme der ersten Zeile—vollständig und mit Leichtigkeit herstellen lässt" ("But a matter of far deeper interest is the clearer insight that we now gain into the allegorical system of Metrodorus of Lampsakos, the student of Anaxagoras, by means of p. 90, which may be established—with the exception of the first line—in its entirety and with ease"). Here for the first time, in what is thought to be a fragment of Philodemus, a record of the specific allegorical identifications of Metrodorus was found (see DK 61 A 4). Gomperz concludes, "So sehen wir denn, dass dieser antike Vorläufer unserer modernen Urschold und Forchhammer es ein systematischer Folgerichtigkeit keineswegs fehlen liess, und dass ihn, was immer sich auch gegen seine Methode einwenden lassen mag, der Vorwurf der Inconsequenz, den man in einer Bemerkung Tatians zu finden geglaubt hat, jedenfalls nicht mit Recht treffen würde" ("So, indeed, we see that this ancient precursor of our modern Urscholds and Forchhammers in no way lacked a systematic consistency, whatever other objections may be raised against his methods, and, in any case, would not with justification meet up with the reproach of inconsistency that has been thought to be found in a remark of Tatian," Gomperz 1888.14).

its use, in both antiquity and modernity, covers a wide range of compositional and interpretive procedures. Two distinctions will prove especially helpful in framing our discussion. First, allegory may be either broadly systematic[6] (in which the characters, objects, and events of a text have one or more non-literal, hidden meanings in addition to their more readily apparent literal meaning) or more narrowly verbal (i.e., a figure of speech in which "hidden meanings" are found in a word or phrase, either by means of puns, etymologies, and anagrams,[7] or by associating the gods or other characters with their chief attributes[8]). This opposition, of course, is not absolute, since the two methods can be used together.[9] Moreover, the term may also refer to isolated narrative elements (Whitman 1993.32) or a brief "episode in a non-allegorical work" (Abrahms 1993.4). Second, we may distinguish between "compositional allegory" (i.e., the activity of a writer who incorporates allegory into his text) and "allegorical interpretation" (i.e., the activity of a reader who finds allegories in a text).[10] Again, these two categories are interrelated, for all allegory involves, in textually-specific, varying proportions, both writerly and readerly activity: an allegorically minded reader needs something in the text to latch onto, but an allegorical poet needs a reader willing and able to spot an allegory.

While antiquity has bequeathed to us no extended theoretical discussions of the workings of allegory and only the vaguest of definitions, the application of ancient allegorical terminology corresponds roughly, if imperfectly, to the range of meanings assigned by modern critics, who, in

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6 Baldick 1990.5 describes allegory as a "structured system," and Abrahms, in his celebrated *Glossary of Literary Terms*, conceives of allegory as a "correlated order" (1993.4).

7 Hera is famously associated with the air (ἀήρ), and Kronos with time (χρόνος). Zeus is called the one through (διά) whom things happen. See also Feeney 1991.21, with his bibliography.

8 The scholiasts were fond of this approach and often proposed allegorical identifications that were confined to particular characters or passages, but made no attempt to show how those passages fit into an overarching allegorical framework. Schol. AD ad *Il*. 1.195, for instance, interprets Athena as φρόνησις. Schol. A ad *Il*. 18.239 identifies Apollo as the sun (for which cf. Schol. Soph. *Ajax* 186), and Schol. ad *Il*. 19.413, 484 claims that Artemis represents the moon. Such an interpretive procedure has a sixth-century precedent in Anaxagoras, who identified Zeus with νοῦς and Athena with τέχνη.

9 Such a strategy had become commonplace by the time of Plutarch 363d, who recounts the famous wordplays of *Kronos/chronos* and *Hera/aer* and then uses these identifications as a point of departure for further allegories.

10 See, e.g., Whitman 1987.1–13 and the same author's excellent "Allegory" entry in the *New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*.

many cases, base their own definitions on classical traditions. At least two terms merit consideration: *allegoria* and *hyponoia*. As Pfeiffer reminds us, the term ἀλληγορία is "probably Hellenistic" (1968.10) and first appears, according to Whitman, "with reference to the grammatical and rhetorical tradition" (1987.264). In Demetrius's treatise *On Style*, for example, it was given the status of a trope for "meaning something other than what one says."[11] On a broader level, "sometimes ἀλληγορέω is simply synonymous with ἑρμηνεύω (Long 1992.63 n. 52), and it was probably not until the first century B.C.E. that *allegoria* was used to describe a *systematic* interpretation of a text.[12] Similarly ὑπόνοια, the more common term for "allegory" in earlier Greek,[13] suggests a "knowing from underneath" or "hidden meaning" that can be construed either broadly or narrowly. In the *Symposium* of Xenophon (3.6), we learn that Anaximander and Stesimbrotus are both teachers of ὑπόνοιαι of Homer. But even this term can be used in various senses ranging from simple wordplay (as in the mock-sophistic arguments of Xenophon's Socrates) to the more systematic interpretations attested by Plato in his famous objections to allegorical readings of Homer (*Republic* 378D).

Long before literary critics developed a uniform vocabulary for discussing poetry, ancient readers of Homer were already interpreting the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in what we might call "allegorical" ways. Pherekydes of Syros, whose precise dates are uncertain, is thought to have been the earliest allegorist, and he claimed that the gods of Homer represent cosmic forces. Theagenes of Rhegium (born c. 525 B.C.E.) was a textual critic and interpreter of Homer about whose ideas slightly more is known (Schol. B ad *Il*. 20.67):

> τοῦ ἀσυμφόρου μὲν ὁ περὶ θεῶν ἔχεται καθόλου λόγος, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ τοῦ ἀπρεποῦς· οὐ γὰρ πρέποντας τοὺς ὑπὲρ τῶν θεῶν μύθους φησίν. πρὸς δὲ τὴν τοιαύτην κατηγορίαν οἱ μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς λέξεως ἐπιλύουσιν, ἀλληγορίαι πάντα εἰρῆσθαι νομίζοντες ὑπὲρ τῆς τῶν στοιχείων φύσεως.

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11 Demetrius uses the term ἀλληγορία five times (99, 102, 151, 283, 285), but offers no definition. Schenkeveld 1964.103 likens Demetrius's usage to Aristotle's phrase τὸ μὴ ὅ φησι λέγειν at *Rhetoric* 1412a, a discussion of metaphors.

12 For the qualification, see Whitman 1987.264.

13 Cf. Plutarch *Mor*. 19E, where the two terms are explicitly related.

> What [Homer] says about the gods is, on the whole, both useless and unseemly, and, indeed, his myths about the nature of the gods are inappropriate. To counter this type of criticism, some offer a defense of his diction, holding that everything he says is allegorical and is about the nature of the primal elements.

Thus, Apollo, Helios, and Hephaistos are fire; Poseidon and Scamander are water; Artemis is the moon; and Hera is the air. It is from this tradition that Metrodorus emerges, according to Diogenes Laertius as quoted above.

Metrodorus's basic allegorical identifications of the heroes and gods of the *Iliad* will be familiar to the reader of any modern history of ancient literary criticism: Achilles, he claimed, is the sun, Hector is the moon, Helen is the earth, Paris is the air, and Agamemnon is the aether; Apollo is the bile, Demeter is the liver, and Dionysius is the spleen.[14]

While modern scholars have described these ideas as "deranged," "crazy," "absurd," "abstruse," and even *abschrecklich*, it is worth considering whether or not Metrodorus's contemporaries would have had such a negative reaction. Unfortunately, there is no clear answer, especially since their work is transmitted second- or third-hand in the briefest of summaries and without any attendant critical vocabulary. Metrodorus is mentioned in no extant text before Plato's *Ion*, where the characterization of his interpretations is, at best, ambivalent (quoted above).

On the one hand, it may be fair to conclude from Ion's comparison of himself with Metrodorus that the interpretations of the Lampsacan became well known in the intervening generations and perhaps even acquired some measure of respectability; otherwise, the comparison has little force. On the other hand, the fact that it is the dense and buffoonish Ion who has elected to compare himself favorably with Metrodorus should give us pause.

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14 Hammerstaedt 1998.28–32 challenges the commonly held view that the identifications reported by Philodemus come specifically from Metrodorus of Lampsacus. While I am of the opinion—with, most recently, Janko 1997.78—that these identifications do indeed belong to Metrodorus, Hammerstaedt's paper offers a welcome caution about the dangers of trying to reconstruct a consistent and comprehensive interpretation of Homer from fragmentary embedded texts. That said, the evidence is overwhelming that the sort of allegorical interpretations traditionally assigned to Metrodorus actually did go on in the fifth century B.C.E., and, while it is fair to say that some of the details of those interpretations cannot be considered settled, the general procedures are nonetheless definable.

The joke may well be that, since Ion really has no clue as to what makes a good interpreter of Homer, the comparison with the notoriously eccentric allegories of Metrodorus only emphasizes his own ignorance. Further, Ion's association with the sophists may, in Plato's view, extend to Metrodorus, who would, by implication, be criticized for making "sophistic use of Homer as a compendium of ethical and technical knowledge" (Richardson 1975.66), a familiar Socratic concern and one echoed by Philodemus, one of Metrodorus's transmitters.[15]

Thus, Plato's remarks focus our attention on one of the classic problems of *allegoresis*: to what extent does the allegorical critic impose a system on a text to suit his own needs, and to what extent does he uncover a system put in place by the poet?[16] It is frustratingly difficult to recover exactly what the ancient critics thought about the compositional and interpretive sides of allegory.[17] We are told that Theagenes, for instance, offered a *defense* of Homer, phrasing that would seem to tip the scales in the interpretive direction: Theagenes used his own ingenuity to devise a method of reading Homer that could save the poet from his critics. Similarly, Longinus asserted that unless one reads the Theomachy allegorically, it is ἄθεα and not τὸ πρέπον (9.7). But this sort of defensive *allegoresis*, used to save Homer's good name, may have also implied that the poet *intended* such a moral meaning. Similarly, the author of the Derveni Papyrus implies that allegory was "fully intended by the poet" (Janko 2001.2.) when he writes: ἱερ[ολογ]εῖται ται μὲν οὖν καὶ ἀ[πὸ το]ῦ πρώτου [ἀεὶ] μέχρι οὗ [τελε]υταίου ῥήματος ("In fact he is speaking allegorically from his first word right through to his last").[18] It is equally possible, however, that the ancient critics were simply less concerned than we moderns about drawing a distinction between compositional and interpretive allegories. Furthermore, whatever conclusions are drawn from parsing the Theagenes testimonium, it

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15 Philodemus *On Poetry* 5.1 = Obbink 1995.256–58 = Mangoni 1993.cols. i–xii.

16 Pfeiffer 1968.5 sees the Λιταί passage of the *Iliad* as an allegory composed by Homer, and he adds that the sixth-century critics who offer allegorical readings of the passage "were only developing, in this as in other fields, something which the imagination of a great poet had once created."

17 Russell 1981.97 concludes (on the basis of uncharacteristically scant evidence) that "ancient interpreters assumed that the authors they were expounding first formulated their message and then gave it allegorical dress."

18 Col. vii, 7–8. The Greek text is that of Tsantsanoglou 1997.95 and the translation is Janko's (2001.21). For an explanation of the connection between the verb ἱερολογεῖσθαι and allegory, see Janko 2001.3, esp. n. 7.

must be remembered that the phrasing may more nearly reflect the mindset of the scholiast who reports Theagenes's allegories than the way in which Theagenes conceived of what he was doing.

And what of Metrodorus? Although we will probably never establish with security whether or not Metrodorus thought that Homer had composed allegorically, the reports of Tatian and Philodemus do offer some potentially fruitful ancient perspectives on the issues at hand. When Tatian writes that the Lampsacan reasons foolishly and "turns everything in allegory," his verb (μετάγειν) suggests that Metrodorus has found allegory where none existed and has made an interpretive allegorical act, and a bad one at that. Philodemus presents a somewhat more problematic case. While he does not mention Metrodorus by name, the critics he refers to seem to have believed that there was allegory involved in the *composition* of Homer's poems:

> ἔνιοι δὲ καὶ φανερῶς μαίνονται, καθάπερ οἱ τὰς δύο ποήσεις Ὁμήρου περὶ τε τοῦ κόσμου λέγοντες πεποιῆσθαι μερῶν καὶ περὶ νόμων καὶ ἐθισμῶν τῶν παρ᾽ ἀνθρώποις . . .
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> But some are plainly mad, like those who say that the two poems of Homer were composed about the elements of the universe and about the laws and customs among men . . .[19]

Philodemus calls such critics "mad." Whether that insanity lies in the very practice of allegorical interpretation or in the specific allegories proposed must, however, remain an open question. Nonetheless, the way in which Philodemus describes the allegory ("about the elements of the universe and about the laws and customs among men") is also revealing. For the allegorical critic, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* should not simply be viewed as tales of gods and heroes but rather as representations of both the divine order of the universe and human ways of understanding its organization.[20] As such, Homeric epic becomes little more than a stand-in for such things as cosmology, law, and

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19 *On Poems* 2 = *P. Herc.* 1676 fr. 2.20ff. = DK 61 A 4.

20 Cf. Richardson 1975.70, who seems to infer that Philodemus is referring to Metrodorus's use of both physical and moral allegories.

ethics. To put it more bluntly, it would seem that Metrodorus has begun with a conceptual framework, in this case Anaxagorean cosmology, and then mapped out the *Iliad* on a preconceived grid—a practice that is uncomfortably similar to the habit of some modern critics, who interpret every text according to the dictates of whichever *-ism* they have already subscribed to.

This practice of using poems, especially Homer's, to promote philosophical ideas was commonplace in antiquity—ἐξ ἀρχῆς καθ' Ὅμηρον ἐπεὶ μεμαθήκασι πάντες ("since the beginning, all have learned from Homer") wrote Xenophanes of Colophon (fr. 10 DK), who dismissed the tales of epic poetry as πλάσματα τῶν προτέρων ("fabrications of men of old") that contain nothing useful (fr. 1.23 DK). On the other hand, perhaps Metrodorus should not be so hastily condemned, for underneath his seemingly shallow claims—in which philosophy masquerades as literary analysis—there lies an unexpected sophistication that is not without consequences for later allegorical critics. If an allegory is to be plausible at all, a critic needs to identify something in the text—no matter how fanciful—that suggests, or at least accords with, the specific allegorical identifications, and the eccentricity of Metrodorus paradoxically necessitates an engagement with the narrative and imagery of the *Iliad* that is broader and deeper than the isolated verbal allegories of many other, more sober, ancient critics.

On the simplest level, the individual identifications are themselves allegorical: whenever the poet mentions the name "Achilles," he refers not to a human being but rather to the sun. Strikingly, such identifications are neither etymologically based, as in the wordplays of *Kronos/chronos* and *Hera/aer*, nor mythologically based, as in Theagenes and several scholiasts who associate the gods with their traditional attributes. Rather, they partake in larger allegorical systems: the heroes, taken collectively, are elements of nature and the gods are parts of the human body. These allegorical groupings are themselves part of a larger allegory—as recognized by Diogenes—in which the totality of nature (*physis*) is represented: the gods stand for the microcosm (man) and the heroes represent the macrocosm (the elements of the universe).

If the justification for Metrodorus's identifications cannot be found within the names of the gods and heroes themselves, the specific points of intersection with Homer's poem are worth establishing with as much precision as possible. At *Iliad* 19.398, Achilles mounts his chariot, τεύχεσι παμφαίνων ὥς τ' ἠλέκτωρ Ὑπερίων ("gleaming in arms like the sun Hyperion"), and at 22.134–35, ἀμφὶ δὲ χαλκὸς ἐλάμπετο εἴκελος αὐγῇ ἢ πυρὸς αἰθομένου ἢ ἠελίου ἀνιόντος ("The bronze around him flashed like

the gleam of fire or of the burning sun as it rises"). Metrodorus has taken his cue from Homer's similes, but rather than see the similes as a figurative way of describing the brightness of Achilles, the Lampsacan transfers the literal meaning to a larger allegory.[21] Similarly, at *Iliad* 8.555, the Trojan fires are compared with the shining stars that surround a gleaming moon (Hector) on a windless night.

Before one becomes too impressed by such textual support, it should be noted that other, contrary allegories can also be defended. At 19.374, the shield of Achilles is likened not to the sun but the moon, Hector's symbol. Furthermore, the phrase τεύχεσι παμφαίνων ὥς τ' ἠλέκτωρ is somewhat formulaic and is applied to Paris, the air in Metrodorus's allegory, at 6.513. The key to Metrodorus's allegorical system, therefore, lies not in the simple identification of Achilles and Hector with the sun and moon based on isolated glosses on specific passages, but rather relates to the allegories' ability to function on a broader narrative level by describing the heroes' interaction in astronomical terms. Thus, Hector's plundering of the gleaming arms of Achilles from the body of Patroklos allegorically represents the physical principle—stated by Anaxagoras (DK 59 A 1)—that the moon derives its light from the sun. Similarly, Achilles' subsequent killing of Hector and recovery of his arms allegorically represents the sun's ability to deprive the moon of its light at dawn.

Agamemnon is much more difficult to account for. According to the philosophy of Anaxagoras, mind (νοῦς) is the initiator of motion, the rotation that drives the universe. The first elements to be separated off by that rotation are aether and air, the forces of hot and cold respectively. Although the special function of the aether is unclear on the basis of the extant fragments of Anaxagoras, it is associated with law (νόμος) in Empedocles. The natural allegory to expect here would be the identification of the aether with Zeus. In the allegory of Metrodorus, however, the gods represent the human organism, while the heroes stand for the cosmos. In this context, Agamemnon is the mortal best suited to represent the aether. Indeed, as Nestle has observed, Agamemnon's scepter, the emblem of his royal power, once belonged to Zeus (1907.507, with *Iliad* 2.101). That said, it must also

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21 In *Met*. 6, Ovid offers a clever poetic example of a simile transformed into a literal condition. In fleeing the evil Tereus, Procne and Philomela moved so rapidly that it was as if they were on wings, when suddenly they were transformed into birds and then actually were on wings!

be acknowledged that nowhere does Homer say, "And just as the aether envelops and rules all things, so Agamemnon ruled over all the Achaians."

Helen is identified with the earth not so much because of her beauty[22] but because she may be regarded as at the center of the *Iliad* universe (Richardson 1975.69). Furthermore, she is embraced by Paris (3.448), just as the earth is embraced by the air in Anaxagorean cosmology. It is at this point, however, that the oddness of Metrodorus's identification of the *mortals* with elements of nature begins to assert itself. Theagenes had said that the *gods* represent the elements, and indeed the "embrace" of Zeus and Hera in *Iliad* 14 is much more explicitly described in those terms. In addition, Theagenes' reading is aided by a supposed etymological identification of Hera with the ἀήρ. Why then does Metrodorus reverse the identification? Why should the *gods* stand for the *microcosm*? One explanation may lie in the practice of associating the gods with human faculties, a common strategy for interpreting the Theomachy. From here it is perhaps not a stretch to extend the interpretation to the physical body.[23]

But what in the text suggests these divine identifications? Apollo is, perhaps, the most straightforward case. When Agamemnon refuses to return Chryseis to her father in *Iliad* 1, Apollo sends a plague upon the Achaians to avenge his priest. Apollo's role as plague-bringer is attested in Herodotus 2.141 as well,[24] and, as the bringer of the plague in the *Iliad*, his function is similar to that of the bile, which, according to Aristotle and other ancient sources,[25] is associated with the "acute" diseases. Such a linkage may be obliquely marked in the text as well: as soon as the plague falls upon the Greeks (382), Agamemnon is moved to "anger"—χόλος, bile (387).[26]

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22 The usually sober Nestle seems to have taken brief leave of his senses when he makes this identification on the basis of a Swabian folk song (1907.508 n. 7).

23 If one may be permitted the indulgence of rank speculation, it is possible that we may detect the germ of a witty response to the criticisms of Xenophanes here: "The gods of the poem do, indeed, represent man, but not in the way you think, Xenophanes. It makes perfect sense for the poet to offer an anthropomorphic representation of the gods—not because they literally behave like mortals, but because, within the *Iliad,* they are an allegory for man."

24 See also Nestle 1907.509.

25 Aristotle *de Part. Anim.* 4.2; Nestle's additional bibliography (1907.509 n. 12) is compelling: "Diels, Vorsok. S. 324, 105 (Anaxagoras); 249, 27 (Philolaos); Euripides, Skyr. fr. 682, 3."

26 Some caution is called for here, of course: unlike σπλήν and ἦπαρ, χόλος is a very common word in Homer (and this is not at all surprising in a poem whose first word is μῆνις), but its use here may facilitate—or at least accord with—the allegory of Metrodorus.

Demeter and Dionysus are more difficult, however. Although they are known to have been very important figures in early Greek religion, Demeter and Dionysus appear in the *Iliad* with surprising infrequency. Furthermore, one would be hard pressed, indeed, to find the words "spleen" or "liver" anywhere near the names of the gods with whom those organs are identified in the Metrodoran scheme. To make any sense out of these identifications, we must turn to the larger allegory in which they are placed, namely that the gods in general represent the microcosm, the human organism. Metrodorus's allegory of the microcosm and macrocosm draws upon a line of theological teaching associated with the sophist Prodicus, who held that what men regard as gods are really merely "things that are useful to human life." As "bread" and "wine" respectively, Demeter and Dionysus occupy a special place in the Prodican scheme, and provide, in the words of Dodds, "the most valuable forms of the Dry and the Wet" elements of which the body of man consists (1960.104). But why relate them to the liver and the spleen? The words ἦπαρ and σπλήν rarely occur in Homer and never have anything to do with Demeter, Dionysus, or any of the gods.[27] As was brilliantly first suggested by Nestle in 1907, the Metrodoran identification of Demeter with the liver and Dionysus with the spleen may owe something to fifth-century medical teaching, which designated the liver and spleen as the most important life-sustaining organs in the human body.[28] That Demeter (the earth-mother) should have this function is not surprising. Indeed, at *Iliad* 21.76, a scholiast glosses Δημήτερος ἀκτή as "bread" and calls it the "source of life."[29]

The tenuous nature of such textual linkages suggests that, for Metrodorus at least, the general allegorical scheme is anterior to the particular interpretation of any given line, yet it also shows the plasticity of the Homeric poems in that they can be accommodated to such a scheme. Still, a basic question remains: once a critic has constructed a scheme for reading allegorically, how far can it be taken? Push it to the minor characters and it becomes more fanciful. As Whitman aptly puts it, "the more allegory

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27 References to the liver generally have to do with wounding scenes, e.g., 11.579, 13.412, and 17.349 (variations of the same line). At 24.212, Hekabe tells Priam she wants to eat the liver of Achilles to avenge the death of her son. Σπλήν does not occur in the *Iliad* as such, and σπλάγχνα is found only in the sacrifice scenes at 1.464 and 2.426, where it is used to mean "entrails."

28 See Diogenes of Apollonia fr. 6 (Diels) and Nestle 1907.510 notes 13–14.

29 See Richardson 1993.60 for further discussion of the scholia on this passage.

exploits the divergence between corresponding levels of meaning, the less tenable the correspondence becomes" (1987.2). If the allegory is too clearly spelled out in the text, it ceases to be figural (or allegorical), but if it is too vague, it becomes less convincing.

Conflict among two or more meanings is a basic characteristic of allegory. In the case of Metrodorus, we are faced with at least two distinct readings of the *Iliad*: the corrupt, immoral, literal reading of a story about god-like humans and human-like gods; and the allegorical reading of a philosophy of nature (*physis*). This conflict is not easily resolved. Any claim of Empsonian ambiguity, which would validate each reading and subsume them into a harmonious whole, is untenable because the two readings are fundamentally incompatible, nor can their dissonance stand as a meaningful uncertainty about the nature of the universe. For the ancient critics, the gods were situated at the heart of the *Iliad*, and one of the stated justifications for allegorical reading was precisely that it purported to answer the charge of immoral divine behavior. Whereas Homer appears to tell a tale of confusion, deceit, and inconsistency among the gods, if the *Iliad* is read allegorically, we can see that the poet is actually revealing the true and permanent divine order of nature. But an irreconcilable, binary opposition between "allegory" and "not-allegory" is equally unsatisfactory, since allegory draws its own coherence from the narrative coherence of the literal. Putting it another way, the allegorizing critic's allegory cannot stand without erasing the literal narrative upon which it is based, yet without that literal meaning, there is no framework within which the allegory can be understood. On one level, "allegory" and "literal" are incompatible; on another, they are inextricable.

It is, therefore, as Friedrich Schlegel put it, "gleich tödtlich für den Geist, ein System zu haben, und keins zu haben."[30] Allegorical writing suggests, indeed needs, a system, yet that system can only be limited or it risks destroying the fictional autonomy of a text and thereby eliminating the tension among various meanings upon which allegory depends. The difficulty here, as with all figural language, lies in disentangling and then deciding among various modes of reading. Context is seldom helpful because it is allegory's very nature to operate throughout the poem, thus enabling anything in the text to be read allegorically (or not). As Paul de

30 Athenäums-Fragment 53, first published in *Athenaeum* in 1798 = Minor 1882.2.211. ("It is equally lethal for the spirit to have a system and not to have one.") Schlegel adds, "Er wird sich also wohl entschliessen müssen, beydes zu verbinden" ("It will simply have to decide to combine both").

Man rightly suggests, "the confusion can only be cleared up by the intervention of an extra-textual intention" (1979.10). This thought, like many good thoughts of the twentieth century, finds its roots in Plato. In the *Republic*, Plato shows his usual perspicacity in pointing out the precise crisis that the allegorical interpretation of Homer opens up. In a justly famous passage, he writes that Homer's myths must not be admitted into the city "whether they are composed in allegory or without it" (378D) because they will make an immediate impression on the minds of the young, who are incapable of distinguishing between what is allegory and what is not. Indeed, without the intervention of philosophy, such a distinction cannot be achieved solely on the basis of the language of the text, yet whatever decision is made about allegory will transform the way in which the entire poem may be understood.

Allegory, then, cannot explain the representations of Homer without itself re-presenting them in the language of philosophy, and it is perhaps not to be viewed so much as a "solution" to the difficulties of Homeric λέξις as an indication that representation cannot be brought to a halt. The ancient allegorizers—especially the weird ones like Metrodorus—remind us that meaning and words are not identical and that, while a poet's words are indeed representative, what they represent is always dissimilar, always other, never coalescing into a stable identity.

The Academy of Notre Dame

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