Terms for Eternity: αἰώνιος and ἀΐδιος in Classical and Christian Texts

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RESUMEN: Este artículo estudia los usos de dos términos del griego antiguo —αἰώνιος y ἀΐδιος— comúnmente traducidos ambos por "eterno", desde sus apariciones más tempranas en la poesía y en la filosofía pre-socrática hasta la versión de la Biblia de los Setenta, el Nuevo Testamento y los escritos del teólogo cristiano Orígenes. Examina, pues, el origen de la idea de un tiempo que se extiende infinitamente (normalmente indicado por ἀΐδιος), y el novedoso concepto inventado por Platón de una eternidad atemporal (a veces descrita con αἰώνιος). Argumenta, además, que en la Biblia griega αἰώνιος, en contraste con ἀΐδιος, no significa necesariamente eternidad absoluta. Dado que solamente αἰώνιος, y jamás ἀΐδιος, se aplica al castigo en el otro mundo, Orígenes pudo encontrar un apoyo en esta distinción para su hipótesis de la salvación universal y de la duración finita del infierno.

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ABSTRACT: This paper surveys the uses of two ancient Greek terms —αἰώνιος and ἀΐδιος— commonly translated as "eternal", from their earliest occurrences in poetry and pre-Socratic philosophy down through the Septuagint and the New Testament, and culminating in the Christian theologian Origen. It examines the rise of the idea of infinitely extended time (generally denoted by ἀΐδιος), and Plato's innovative introduction of a concept of a timeless eternity (sometimes described as αἰώνιος). It is argued that in the Greek Bible, αἰώνιος, as opposed to ἀΐδιος, does not necessarily denote absolute eternity. Since only αἰώνιος, and never ἀΐδιος, is applied to punishment in the afterlife, Origen could find support in this usage for his doctrine of universal salvation and the finite duration of hell.

PALABRAS CLAVE: ἀΐδιος, αἰώνιος, Biblia, Christian Texts, Classical Texts, Eternity, Origen.
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In this article, we offer a preliminary introduction to the research we are undertaking into the uses of two ancient Greek terms that are commonly translated as "eternal". The terms are αἰώνιος and ἀΐδιος. Neither word, as it happens, is to be found in the Homeric epics or in the major poems of Hesiod *(Theogony* and *Works and Days),* although the noun αἰών, from which αἰώνιος derives, is very common, mainly in the sense of a "life" or "lifetime". So far as we can judge, ἀΐδιος enters into Greek sooner, whereas αἰώνιος first occurs, surprisingly enough, in Plato. As we point out, Plato's introduction of the term is philosophically significant, as is the fact that Aristotle eschewed it completely in his own copious writings. The subsequent history of these terms, and the dance in which they engage with each other throughout Greek literature and philosophy, is fascinating in itself, but the real pay-off, as will appear, is in the way these terms are employed in the Septuagint and the New Testament, and thereafter in Christian writers who are usually equally familiar with the connotations of these words both in the pagan tradition and in Scripture. What is more, a great deal proves to be at stake in how these two terms are interpreted: in fact, nothing less than the prospect of the eternal damnation of sinners versus the universal salvation of all in the end. These are big issues, needless to say, and much hangs, in this case, on the results of careful philological and lexical investigation. Thus, what may seem to be a dry investigation of subtle terminological

distinctions proves to be a key to understanding ancient philosophical and religious thought.

The notion of "eternity" is not simple, in part because "eternity" has multiple senses, in part too because some of these significances are not immediately self-evident, and involve a high level of philosophical abstraction. On the one hand, terms for "eternal" may bear the loose sense of "a very long time", as in the English "always", without implying a rigorous notion of infinitely extended time. Even at this level, the Greek adverb αἰεί, like the English "always", has at least two distinct connotations, referring both to an indefinitely prolonged stretch of time, equivalent to the English "forever" ("I will always love you"), and to an action that is regularly repeated ("he always comes late to class"). And again, there are intermediate uses, for example, "the house has always been on that street", meaning that, as long as the house has existed, it has been in the same place, without any implication of unlimited duration. On the other hand, "eternal" may signify a strictly boundless extent of time, that is, greater than any numerical measure one can assign. This latter description is itself imprecise, of course. It may mean nothing more than "countless", that is, too large to grasp, or grasp easily. The Epicureans, indeed, speak of an order of magnitude that is neither finite nor infinite, which they define as "incomprehensible but not absolutely infinite": an example in nature is the speed of atoms travelling in a void. But eternal time is more commonly understood to be strictly endless, with no termination at all. Even on this more rigorous conception, for which modern mathematics can render a precise definition, there are two senses in which time may be said to be eternal. It may, as some thinkers both ancient and modern have maintained, have a beginning but no end (or, though this is a rare view, an end but no beginning); or time may, as others have held, have neither a beginning nor an end, but extend infinitely into the past and the future. What is more, in addition

to all these varieties of "eternal", the adjective has been appropriated also to denote something like "timelessness", a changeless state that has no duration and hence is not subject to time at all. This sense too is attested in classical thought, although it is not characteristic of popular usage.

We begin with a brief review of eternity in the presocratic thinkers. Ps.-Plutarch, *Strom.*, 2, ascribes to Anaximander[1] the idea that corruption and genesis occur in cycles ἐξ ἀπείρου αἰῶνος, "from an infinite time", but these are surely not Anaximander's own words. Similarly, Hippolytus *Refutatio omnium heresium* cites Heraclitus' words, "The Thunderbolt steers everything",[2] and goes on to explain that Heraclitus "calls the eternal fire 'Thunderbolt'": κεραυνὸν τὸ πῦρ λέγων τὸ αἰώνιον). Similar usages are ascribed to the Pythagoreans,[3] but these again are clearly later inventions.

In contrast to αἰώνιος, the adjective ἀΐδιος is attested in the sense of "eternal" or "perpetual" as early as the Homeric *Hymn to Hestia*[4] and the Hesiodic *Shield of Heracles*,[5] but in neither case does the expression imply a technical sense of "eternal."

With the Presocratics, however, the term ἀΐδιος in the sense of "eternal" seems to come into its own, in a series of testimonies beginning with Anaximander and continuing on down to Melissus and beyond, although here again one must be careful to distinguish between paraphrases and original terminology. For Anaximander, any of the attributed sentences would, taken alone, be of doubtful authority, for example Testimony 12A12 D-K, which reports that Anaximander held that a principle more ancient than water is "perpetual movement"

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[1] Cf. 12A10 D-K.

[2] Cf. fr. 22B64 D-K.

[3] Cf. John Lydus, *On the Months,* 2.8 = Ocellus, 48.8 D-K; Stobaeus, *Ecl.*, 1.20.2 = 44B21 D-K.

[4] Cf. 29.3.

[5] Cf. 311.

(τὴν ἀΐδιον κίνησιν); taken together, the several passages perhaps suggest that Anaximander himself may have applied the adjective ἀΐδιος to motion. For Xenophanes we have attestations of his use of ἀΐδιος in the sense not only of "indestructible" or "immortal" but also that of ἀγένητος, "ungenerated";[6] Xenophanes argues here that "either there exists nothing besides god, or all other things too are ἀΐδια." Again, the convergence of the various accounts suggests that Xenophanes may in fact have employed the adjective ἀΐδιος in reference to god or the universe conceived of as a single whole. Two testimonies concerning Heraclitus cite ἀΐδιος as referring to the perpetual movement of things that are eternal and to the cyclical fire (τὸ περιοδικὸν πῦρ), which is god.[7] Heraclitus' use of the term ἀΐδιος in connection with cyclical phenomena is particularly noteworthy, for in later texts recurring or periodic events tend to be described rather by the word αἰώνιος.

With Empedocles, we have the use of the term ἀΐδιος in his Καθαρμοί, guaranteed by the meter: "there is a thing of Necessity, an ancient decree of the gods, eternal".[8] Aetius[9] informs us —according to a supplement by Diels— that Empedocles maintained that the "One" was "spherical, eternal, and immobile." Among the Eleatics, Parmenides is said to have described the "all" as ἀΐδιος, in that it is ungenerated and imperishable.[10] As for Melissus, Simplicius[11] provides what appears to be a direct quotation affirming that "nothing that has a beginning and end is either eternal [ἀΐδιον] or infinite." It is worth noting that nowhere is the term αἰώνιος ever attributed to the Eleatics. There is no reliable evidence for the usage of the

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[6] Cf. Test. 21A28 D-K.

[7] Cf. Aetius, 1.7.22 = Test. 8 D-K; cf. Aristotle, *De caelo*, 1.10, 279b12 ff. = Test. 10 D-K.

[8] Cf. fr. 31B115, vv. 1-2.

[9] Cf. 1.7.8 = Test. 32 D-K.

[10] Cf. Eusebius, *Praep. Evang.*, 1.8.5 = Test. 22 D-K.

[11] Cf. *in Phys.*, 110.2 = fr. 30B4 D-K.

early Pythagoreans in this regard, though later writers ascribed the term to them. According to Simplicius,[12] Diogenes of Apollonia held that the air is eternal (ἀΐδιον) and infinite. Simplicius cites the actual words of Diogenes[13] to the effect that air "is a body eternal and immortal [ἀΐδιον καὶ ἀθάνατον]".[14]

Finally, Democritus too argued, according to Simplicius,[15] that time was ἀΐδιος, on the grounds that it was ungenerated, and, according to Aristotle,[16] that the whole of things too was eternal (ἀΐδιον τὸ πᾶν). In addition, a fragment of Aristotle's treatise *On Democritus*[17] preserved by Simplicius,[18] informs us that the atoms, according to Democritus, were also eternal by nature, as well as small and infinite in number.

It would appear, in sum, that the term of art for eternal things —all that is ungenerated and imperishable— among cosmological thinkers in the period prior to Plato was ἀΐδιος, never αἰώνιος. In addition, ἀΐδιος is the standard adjective meaning "eternal" in non-philosophical discourse of the fifth century as well.

When we come to Plato, we find uses of both adjectives, αἰώνιος and ἀΐδιος, in the sense of "eternal". Thus, in the pseudo-Platonic *Definitions,* ἀΐδιον is defined as that which exists throughout all time, and is uncreated and not subject to corruption.[19] In the *Axiochus,*[20] we read of the "everlasting punishments" (αἰδίοις τιμωρίαις) of those great sinners, like

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[12] Cf. *in Phys.,* 25.1 ff. = Test. 64A5 citing Theophrastus, *Views of the Physicists*.

[13] Cf. 153.17 ff. = fr. 7 D-K.

[14] Cf. also fr. 8 D-K.

[15] Cf. *in Phys.,* 1153.22 ff. = Test. 68A71 D-K.

[16] Cf. *Mete.,* 2.3, 356b4 = Test. 100 D-K.

[17] Cf. fr. 208 Rose.

[18] Cf. *in De cael.,* 294.33ff. Heib. = Test. 37 D-K.

[19] Cf. *Def.,* 411A1-2.

[20] Cf. 372A3.

the Danaids and Tantalus, who have been condemned to the underworld; for the ever-repeated devouring and regeneration of the entrails of Tityus, however, the adverb αἰωνίως is employed,[21] perhaps suggesting cycles rather than eternal linear time.

It is in the *Timaeus,* however, that Plato enters most fully into the question of eternity, and here we find ἀΐδιος six times, αἰών four times, and αἰώνιος twice. Plato introduces the concept[22] in reference to the model that the demiurge followed in creating the sensible universe by looking "to the eternal" (πρὸς τὸ ἀΐδιον, bis). This is the first occurrence in Greek literature, it would appear, of the nominalized adjective. Then, in a crucial passage, Plato remarks that the created universe was seen to be moving and living, an image of the eternal gods (τῶν ἀϊδίων θεῶν),[23] and adds that it was itself an "eternal living thing" (ζῷον ἀΐδιον).[24] Plato goes on to say that it was the nature of the living thing to be eternal (τοῦ ζῴου φύσις ἐτύγχανεν οὖσα αἰώνιος)[25] —note the shift of vocabulary here— but that this quality could not be attached to something that was begotten (γεννητός). The creator therefore decided to make "a kind of moving image of eternity" (εἰκὼ δ᾽ ἐπενόει κινητόν τινα αἰῶνος),[26] and so as he arranged the universe he made "an eternal image moving according to number of the eternity remaining in one" (μένοντος αἰῶνος ἐν ἑνὶ κατ᾽ ἀριθμὸν ἰοῦσαν αἰώνιον εἰκόνα),[27] and this he called "time". Like the universe, time itself can be undone, but the model or *paradeigma* is "of a sempiternal nature" (τῆς διαιω-

[21] Cf. 371E7.

[22] Cf. 29A3, 5.

[23] Cf. 37C6.

[24] Cf. 37D1.

[25] Cf. 37D3.

[26] Cf. 37D5.

[27] Cf. 37D6-7.

νίας φύσεως),[28] existing "for all eternity" (πάντα αἰῶνα).[29] Finally, the fixed stars are said to be "divine living things and eternal" (ἀΐδια).[30]

On the one hand, ἀΐδιος and αἰώνιος appear to be virtually interchangeable: the model for the universe is "an eternal living thing" (ζῷον ἀΐδιον) and its nature is eternal (τοῦ ζῴου φύσις οὖσα αἰώνιος). Both "eternity" (αἰῶνα) and "eternal being" (ἀΐδιος οὐσία) are tenseless, without distinction of past, present and future. And yet, Plato seems to have found in the term αἰών a special designation for his notion of eternity as timeless, one that could substitute for the nominal phrase τὸ ἀΐδιον; and with this new sense of αἰών, αἰώνιος too seems to have come into its own (along with διαιώνιος) as a signifier for what is beyond time. It was Plato who first articulated this idea of eternity, and he would appear to have created a terminology to give it expression. Although we cannot go into detail here, we may note that Plotinus and Porphyry further developed Plato's conception of a timeless eternity —a view that remained specific to Platonism and closely related schools in antiquity.

Aristotle, as we have said, seems never to use the term αἰώνιος, and αἰών only occasionally, most often in the traditional sense of "life". At the same time, there are nearly 300 instances of ἀΐδιος, which is Aristotle's preferred word to designate things eternal. It is clear that Aristotle was not moved to adopt Plato's novel terminology, whether because he perceived some difference between his own concept of eternity and that of his teacher, or because he felt that αἰώνιος was an unnecessary addition to the philosophical vocabulary, given the respectability of ἀΐδιος as the appropriate technical term. We may note too that the same disproportion we have

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[28] Cf. 38B8; 39E2.

[29] Cf. 38C2.

[30] Cf. 40B5.

observed in Aristotle in the use of the two terms is reflected as well in the Aristotelian commentators, for example Aspasius, Alexander of Aphrodisias, and Simplicius.

In the Stoics, ἀΐδιος occurs over thirty times in the sense of that which endures forever. It is applied to bodies and matter, the ὄντα or realities that truly exist according to Stoic materialism, and above all to god or Zeus. To the extent that the Stoics employed αἰώνιος and its cognate αἰών, however, there is either a connection with their specific view of cosmic cycles, as opposed to strictly infinite duration, or else the noun occurs in phrases indicating a long period of time or an eternity. As for later Stoicism, we may note that Posidonius[31] employs αἰώνιος in connection with cyclical events that continue over time, such as tides. In this, Posidonius is in accord with single use of the term that is cited for the Old Stoa. Also, the adjective αἰώνιος can refer to the condition of life in the world to come, as in the mention[32] of the view that death is an evil "because of lasting terrifying retributions and punishments in the underworld" (τιμωρίαις αἰωνίοις ὑπὸ γῆν καὶ κολασμοὶς φρικώδεσι); since the Stoics rejected the notion of a permanent afterlife, it is not dignified with the epithet ἀΐδιος, which pertains rather to truly eternal elements in the Stoic system.

The Epicureans, in turn, regularly employ ἀΐδιος to designate the eternity of such imperishable constituents of the universe as atoms and void. In the *Letter to Herodotus,*[33] on the other hand, Epicurus uses αἰώνιος in reference to the future life that non-Epicureans expect, with its dreadful punishments: that is, to an afterlife in which Epicureans do not believe, and which does not deserve the name "eternal" (ἀΐδιος), properly reserved for truly perpetual elements. So too, in *Principal Doctrine,* 28, Epicurus affirms that "nothing terrible is αἰώνιος

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[31] Cf. fr. 44a Theiler.

[32] Cf. fr. 441e Theiler.

[33] Cf. 81.

or longlasting" (μηθὲν αἰώνιον εἶναι δεινὸν μηδὲ πολυχρόνιον), where αἰώνιος clearly bears the sense of "life-long".

Given the prevalence of the term ἀΐδιος in Greek literature down through the Hellenistic period, it comes as something of a surprise that in the Septuagint, ἀΐδιος is all but absent, occurring in fact only twice, both times in late books written originally in Greek: 4 Maccabees, 10: 15.2, and Wisdom, 7: 26.1. In addition, there is one instance of the abstract noun, ἀϊδιότης, again in Wisdom,[34] attested prior to this only in Aristotle (the word occurs 11 times, however, in Philo).

On the other hand, αἰώνιος occurs with impressive frequency, along with αἰών; behind both is the Hebrew *ᶜolâm*. A few examples of its uses must suffice. In Gen., 9: 16, the perpetual covenant with human beings after the flood, commemorated by the rainbow, is termed διαθήκη αἰώνιος, just as in Gen., 7: 13.19, it is that between God and Abraham and his descendants; in Ex., 31: 16, it is the compact between God and Israel sanctified by the observance of the Sabbath, which in turn is called "an eternal sign" (σημεῖον αἰώνιον) of this covenant across the generations and ages (αἰῶνες). In Is., 63: 12, we see the sense of αἰώνιος relative to αἰών, understood as a time in the remote past or future, in accord with the original significance of *ᶜolâm* in the Hebrew: ἐμνήσθη ἡμερῶν αἰωνίων, "he remembered days long past", in the time of Moses.

In general, the sense of αἰώνιος is that of something lasting over the centuries, or relating to remote antiquity, rather than absolute eternity. Now, when the same term is employed in reference to God, e.g., Θεὸς αἰώνιος ("eternal God"),[35] the question arises: does αἰώνιος mean simply "long-lasting" in these contexts as well, or is a clear idea of God's everlasting-ness present in at least some of these passages? Take, for example, Ex., 3: 15, rendered in the RSV as follows:

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[34] Cf. 2: 23.2.

[35] Cf. Gen., 21: 33.

> God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you": this is my name for ever [αἰώνιον], and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations [γενεῶν γενεαῖς].

The emphasis on successive generations, past and future, suggests perhaps that αἰώνιος here connotes repeated ages, rather than a strictly infinite period of time. Many of the other examples come from relatively late texts, but even in these it is difficult to decide which sense is intended, in the absence of the kind of precise language to be found in the philosophers but alien to the Hebrew Scriptures. In some cases, moreover, the reference may be to the next epoch or αἰών, rather than to an infinite time as such.

Of particular interest is the mention in Tobias[36] of the place of the afterlife as a τόπος αἰώνιος, the first place in the Hebrew Bible in which αἰώνιος unequivocally refers to the world to come.[37] In 2 Mac., 7: 9, the doctrine of resurrection is affirmed and αἰώνιος is used with reference to life in the future world, εἰς αἰώνιον ἀναβίωσιν ζωῆς ἡμᾶς ἀναστήσει. In sum, the Septuagint almost invariably employs αἰώνιος, in association with the various senses of αἰών, in the sense of a remote or indefinite or very long period of time (like *ʿolâm)*, with the possible connotation of a more absolute sense of "eternal" when the term is used in reference to God, from whom it borrows, as it were, its more abstract significance. In certain late books, like those of Tobias and the Maccabees, there is a reference to life in the αἰών, understood in an eschatological sense as the world to come, in opposition to the present one (κόσμος, καιρός).

The adjective ἀΐδιος occurs, as we have noted, only twice in the Septuagint. In Wisdom, which is saturated with the

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[36] Cf. 3: 6.

[37] Cf. Is., 33: 14.

Greek philosophical lexicon, Wisdom is defined[38] as ἀπαύγασμα φωτὸς ἀϊδίου, "a reflection of the eternal light" that is God. In 4 Mac., 12: 12, an impious tyrant is threatened with "fire αἰώνιον" for the entire age or world to come (εἰς ὅλον τὸν αἰῶνα). But here we find the expression βίος ἀΐδιος or "eternal life" as well (τὸν ἀΐδιον τῶν εὐσεβῶν βίον), in reference to the afterlife of the martyrs;[39] this blessed state, moreover, is opposed to the lasting destruction of their persecutor in the world to come (τὸν αἰώνιον τοῦ τυράννου ὄλεθρον, ibid.). This contrast between the parallel but antithetical expressions ὄλεθρος αἰώνιος and βίος ἀΐδιος is notable. Both adjectives refer to the afterlife, that is, a future αἰών, but whereas retribution is described with the more general and polysemous term αἰώνιος, to life in the beyond is applied the more technical term ἀΐδιος, denoting, at least in classical philosophy, a strictly endless condition.

In the New Testament, when the reference is to God, αἰώνιος may be presumed to signify "eternal" in the sense of "perpetual", as at Heb., 9: 14, where it is applied also to the Holy Spirit (πνεῦμα αἰώνιον). Also perpetual is Christ's reign 2 Pt., 1: 11, αἰώνιον βασιλείαν, and Christ himself is "the eternal life" (τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον) that was with the Father in 1 Jo., 1: 2. Nevertheless, the precise sense of αἰώνιος in the New Testament, as in the Hebrew Bible, cannot be resolved with the help of explicit definitions or statements equating it with terms such as "ungenerated" and "imperishable," of the sort found in the philosophers and in Philo of Alexandria. Hence, the positions adopted by religious scholars in this controversy have embraced both extremes. On the one hand, William Russell Straw,[40] affirms of αἰών that, in the Septuagint,

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[38] Cf. 7: 26.

[39] Cf. 4 Mac., 10: 15.

[40] Cf. Αἰών *and* Αἰώνιος: *A Word Study of their Most Important Occurrences*, Diss. The Evangelical Theological College, Dallas, Texas, 1935, p. 303.

> it is never found with the meaning of "life", "lifetime", proving the great advance in its use under the hand of God... The majority of instances can bear only the meaning "eternal..." Of the one hundred two occurrences of αἰών in the New Testament, sixty-six unmistakably refer to eternity, a proportion of three-fifths to the whole. This is too great a proportion with which to trifle.

As for αἰώνιος, "It may be rendered 'eternal' or 'everlasting' in every occurrence".[41] Peder Margido Myhre, on the contrary, argues that the Platonic sense of the term as "metaphysical endlessness" is entirely absent in the New Testament, and concludes:

> As αἰών in the New Testament is limited to denote the ages of the past, present, and future of this world, so the adjective should follow that usage except when modifying God. Consequently, these words which do not mean "endless" cannot prove the everlastingness of God, for then they would also prove the everlastingness of sinners.[42]

Myhre goes on to affirm in with some passion:

> Since, in all Greek literature, sacred and profane, αἰώνιος is applied to finite things overwhelmingly more frequently than to things immortal, no fair critic can assert with any degree of probability that when it is qualifying the future punishment it has the stringent meaning of metaphysical endlessness... The idea of eternal torment introduced into these words of the Bible by a theological school that was entirely ignorant of the Greek language would make God to be a cruel tyrant, compared to whom the most ingenious inventors of torment in modern concentration camps would be mere amateurs.[43]

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[41] Cf. ib., p. 304.

[42] Cf. Myhre, *The Concept of* Olam, Aion *and* Aionios *in the Light of the Biblical and Certain Other Related Languages,* Diss. Pacific Union College, Angwin, California, 1947, pp. 159-160.

[43] Cf. ib., pp. 160-161.

We turn now to the two uses of the more strictly philosophical term ἀΐδιος in the New Testament. The first[44] refers unproblematically to the power and divinity of God: ἥ τε ἀΐδιος αὐτοῦ δύναμις καὶ θειότης. In the second occurrence, however,[45] ἀΐδιος is employed of eternal punishment —not that of human beings, however, but of evil angels, who are imprisoned in darkness (ὑπὸ ζόφον) "with eternal chains" (δεσμοῖς ἀϊδίοις). But there is a qualification: "until the judgment of the great day" (εἰς κρίσιν μεγάλης ἡμέρας). The angels, then, will remain chained up until Judgment Day; we are not informed of what will become of them afterwards. Why ἀΐδιος of the chains, instead of αἰώνιος, used in the next verse of the fire of which the punishment of the Sodomites is an example? Perhaps because they continue from the moment of the angels' incarceration, at the beginning of the world, until the judgment that signals the entry into the new αἰών: thus, the term indicates the uninterrupted continuity throughout all time in this world —this could not apply to human beings, who do not live through the entire duration of the present universe; to them applies rather the sequence of αἰῶνες or generations.

We conclude with a glance at Origen's use of αἰώνιος and ἀΐδιος.[46] In Origen, there are many passages that refer to the αἰώνιος life, in the formula characteristic of the New Testament: the emphasis seems to be not so much on eternity, that is, temporal infinity, as on the life in the next world or αἰών. A particularly clear instance is (we believe) *Philocalia,* 1.30. 21-23, where the αἰώνιος life is defined as that which will occur in the future αἰών. Origen affirms that God gave Scripture "body for those who existed before us [i.e., the Hebrews], soul for us, and spirit [πνεῦμα] for those in the αἰών to come, who

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[44] Cf. Rm., 1: 20.

[45] Cf. Jud., 6.

[46] In our larger project we carry our investigation down to the time of Dionysius the Ps.-Areopagite.

will obtain a life αἰώνιος". So too, in the *Commentary on Matthew,*[47] the future life (αἰώνιος) is contrasted with that in the present (πρόσκαιρος). Again, Origen in a series of passages opposes the ephemeral sensible entities of the present time (πρόσκαιρα) to the invisible and lasting objects of the world to come (αἰώνια).

In the *Commentary on John*,[48] Origen explains: "the expression 'And he gathers the fruit for αἰώνιος life' means either that what is gathered is the fruit of αἰώνιος life or that it itself is αἰώνιος life." In the *Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, 22.11, in turn, Origen writes: "I believe that punishments are given as due and as retribution for sins. That is why even the Apostle said that death is the wages of sin. But the αἰώνιος life is no longer these wages and, as it were, what is due on the part of God, but rather a gift of grace." Here life in the αἰών is consistent with punishment that is prior, but does not endure in the apocatastasis.

Consistent with the usage of the Septuagint and the New Testament, Origen also applies the adjective αἰώνιος to attributes of God. In one particularly illuminating passage,[49] Origen speaks of the eternal God (τοῦ αἰωνίου θεοῦ) and of the concealment of the mystery of Jesus over αἰώνιος stretches of time (χρόνοις αἰωνίοις), where the sense is plainly "from time immemorial." So too, at *Commentary on Matthew*, 15.31. 37, Origen mentions the "days of the αἰών", and "αἰώνια years" (ἔτη αἰώνια), that is, very long periods of time, and the phrase εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας here signifies "for a very long time".

In Origen, the adjective ἀΐδιος occurs much less frequently than αἰώνιος, and when it is used, it is almost always in reference to God or His attributes; it presumably means "eternal" in the strict sense of limitless in time, as in, e.g.,

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[47] Cf. 15.25.

[48] Cf. 13.46.299.

[49] Cf. *Commentary on Romans* (cod. Athon. Laura 184 B64), 16.26.

Selected Passages in the Commentary on the Psalms, vol. 12, p. 1560.35 PG: ἡ μὲν αἰσθητὴ ζωὴ οὐκ ἀΐδιος, τὸ δὲ ἔλεος τοῦ Κυρίου ἀΐδιον, "perceptible life is not eternal, but the mercy of the Lord is eternal":[50] ἀΐδιον καὶ ἀπαράτρεπτον καὶ ἀθάνατον, "eternal, immutable, immortal" [of God], commenting on the expression, σὺ μένεις εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, "You endure for eternity."

In *On Principles,* 3.3.5, Origen gives a clear sign that he understands αἰών in the sense of a succession of αἰῶνες prior to the final apocatastasis, at which point one arrives at the true eternity, that is, ἀϊδιοτής. Eternity in the strict sense pertains, according to Origen, to the apocatastasis, not to the previous sequence of ages or αἰῶνες. So too, Origen explains that Christ "reigned without flesh prior to the ages, and reigned in the flesh in the ages".[51] Again, the "*coming* αἰών" indicates the next world (ἐπὶ τὸν μέλλοντα αἰῶνα), where sinners will indeed be consigned to the πῦρ αἰώνιον, that is, the fire that pertains to the future world; it may well last for a long time, but it is not, for Origen, eternal.[52]

In this connection, it seems particularly significant that Origen calls the fire of damnation πῦρ αἰώνιον, but never πῦρ ἀΐδιον.[53] The explanation is that he does not consider this flame to be absolutely eternal: it is αἰώνιον because it belongs to the next world, as opposed to the fire we experience in this present world, and it lasts as long as the αἰώνες do, in their succession. It does not, however, endure into the ἀϊδιότης, that is, in the absolute eternity of the final apocatastasis. Similarly, Origen never speaks of θάνατος ἀΐδιος, or of ἀΐδια punishments and torments and the like, although he does speak of

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[50] Cf. *Fragments of the Commentary on the Psalms,* Ps 101.13.7.

[51] Cf. αἰωνίως, adverb: *Selected Passages on the Psalms,* 12.1676, and *Commentary on John,* 10.30.187: ἀποσταλησομένους κατὰ τὸν μετὰ τοῦτον αἰῶνα.

[52] Cf. *Selected Passages on the Psalms,* 12.1156.

[53] Cf. *On Principles,* 3.1.6; *Homilies on Jeremiah,* 19.15; *Selections on the Psalms,* 12.1156, where the context specifies that the αἰώνιον fire pertains to "the αἰών to come" (ἐπὶ τὸν μέλλοντα αἰῶνα).

θάνατος αἰώνιος,[54] eternal chastisements (κολάσεις αἰώνιοι),[55] and so forth.

Origen was deeply learned in both the Bible and the classical philosophical tradition; what is more, he maintained that damnation was not eternal, but served rather to purify the wicked, who would in the end be saved in the universal apocatastasis. His careful deployment of the adjectives αἰώνιος and ἀΐδιος reflects, we have argued, both his sensitivity to the meaning of the latter among the Greek philosophers, and the distinction that is apparently observed in the use of these terms in the Bible. For Origen, this was further evidence in Scripture for the doctrine of universal salvation.

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[54] Cf. *Selected Passages on the Psalms,* 13.824; *Selected Passages on Ezechiel,* 13.824.

[55] Cf., e.g., *Fragments of the Commentary on John,* 42; *Against Celsus,* 3.78, 8.48; *Homilies on Jeremiah,* 20.4; *Fragments of the Commentary on John,* 42; *Selections from the Commentary on Ezekiel,* 13.793.

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