

Coptic Plato Republic 588a-589b & Gospel of Thomas

I want to see if we can recognize in the Gospel of Thomas certain passages which may be related to the Coptic fragment of Plato's Republic book 9 (588a-589b, NHL Codex VI, tractate 5).

Below is a comparison of James M. Brashler's translation of NHL codex VI, tractate #5 (from J. M. Robinson's *Nag Hammadi Library*) and two other well known translations. Plato's Republic was written, of course, in Greek. It is said that the NHL Coptic translation was so poor that critics did not at first realize it was a pericope from Plato's Republic. This is said to be due to the difficulty of translating Greek, which is a highly inflected language, into "clumsy" Coptic. That being said, note how even the two English translators featured below struggled to capture the sense of the Greek.

I have heard it said that the Coptic translator misrepresented the intent of the Greek, in order to make it conform to certain Gnostic themes. On the other hand, it appears to me that the Coptic translator captured much of the sense, with the major divergences marked with bold. In these cases, he seems to have reversed either the meaning or the tense of verbs. The other passages, however, seem to not notice these oddities, and returns right away to following the sense of the Greek. Since I do not know Coptic, I cannot explain this, although I believe that the grammar can be interpreted more than one way depending on context.

So, how well do we really understand what the Coptic translator was trying to say? He may have been struggling, for sure, but I think he understood the concept of a multitude of creatures within the shell of each man, which we might today call Id, Ego and Superego, each struggling for control. While Plato considered it possible for that which is rational inside of a man to control the many headed beast and the lion within, it seems as though the Coptic translator considered the struggle extremely difficult and not quite won.

NHL Codex VI, 5. Coptic paraphrase of Plato's Republic 588a-589b	Plato, Republic, Book IX (588a-589b)	Plato, Republic, Book IX (588a-589b)
Translated by James Brashler, in James M. Robinson, ed., <i>The Nag Hammadi Library</i> , revised edition. HarperCollins, San Francisco, 1990	<i>The Republic: With an English translation</i> by Paul Shorey. Revised Loeb Edition: Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vols. 5 & 6. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1969 (sic) [vol 2, 1970 (1937)]	Translated by Benjamin Jowett, <i>The Republic of Plato: translated into English, with introd., analysis, marginal analysis, and index</i> , Oxford: Clarendon Press, 3 rd revised edition, 1888
"Since we have come to this point in a discussion, let us again take up the first things	[588a] "... And now that we have come to this point in the argument, [588b] let	and now having arrived at this stage of the argument, we may revert to the words

that were said to us.	us take up again the statement with which we began and that has brought us to this pass.	which brought us hither:
And we will find that he says, ' Good is he who has been done injustice completely. He is glorified justly. ' Is not this how he was reproached?"	It was, I believe, averred that injustice is profitable to the completely unjust man who is reputed just. Was not that the proposition?"	Was not some one saying that injustice was a gain to the perfectly unjust who was reputed to be just?
"This is certainly the fitting way!"	"Yes, that."	Yes, that was said.
And I said, "Now then, we have spoken because he said that he who does injustice and he who does justice each has a force."	"Let us, then, reason with its proponent now that we have agreed on the essential nature of injustice and just conduct."	Now then, having determined the power and quality of justice and injustice, let us have a little conversation with him.
"How then?"	"How?" he said.	What shall we say to him?
"He said, 'An image that has no likeness is the rationality of soul,' so that he who said these things will understand.	"By fashioning in our discourse a symbolic image of the soul, that the maintainer of that proposition may see precisely what it is that he was saying."	Let us make an image of the soul, that he may have his own words presented before his eyes.
He [...] or not?	[588c] "What sort of an image?" he said.	Of what sort?
We [...] is for me. But all [...] who told them [...] ruler, these now have become natural creatures - even Chimaera and Cerberus and all the rest that were mentioned. They all came down and they cast off forms and images. And they all became a single image.	"One of those natures that the ancient fables tell of," said I, "as that of the Chimaera or Scylla or Cerberus, and the numerous other examples that are told of many forms grown together in one."	An ideal image of the soul, like the composite creations of ancient mythology, such as the Chimera or Scylla or Cerberus, and there are many others in which two or more different natures are said to grow into one.
It was said, 'Work now!'	"Yes, they do tell of them."	There are said of have been such unions.
Certainly it is a single image that became the image of a complex beast with many heads. Some days indeed it is like the image of a wild beast. Then it is able to cast off the first image. And all	"Mould, then, a single shape of a manifold and many-headed beast that has a ring of heads of tame and wild beasts and can change them and cause to spring forth from itself all such	Then do you now model the form of a multitudinous, many-headed monster, having a ring of heads of all manner of beasts, tame and wild, which he is able to

these hard and difficult forms emanate from it with effort, since these are formed now with arrogance.	growths.”	generate and metamorphose at will.
And also all the rest that are like them are formed now through the word. For now it is a single image.	[588d] “It is the task of a cunning artist,” he said, “but nevertheless, since speech is more plastic than wax and other such media, assume that it has been so fashioned.”	You suppose marvelous powers in the artist; but, as language is more pliable than wax or any similar substance, let there be such a model as you propose.
For the image of the lion is the one thing and the image of the man is another. [...] single [...] is the [...] of [...] join. And this [...] much more complex than the first. And the second is small.”	“Then fashion one other form of a lion and one of a man and let the first be far the largest and the second second in size.”	Suppose now that you make a second form as of a lion, and a third of a man, the second smaller than the first, and the third smaller than the second.
"It has been formed."	“That is easier,” he said, “and is done.”	That, he said, is an easier task; and I have made them as you say.
"Now then, join them to each other and make them a single one - for they are three - so that they grow together,	“Join the three in one, then, so as in some sort to grow together.”	And now join them, and let the three grow into one.
	“They are so united,” he said.	That has been accomplished.
and all are in a single image outside of the image of the man just like him who is unable to see the things inside him. But what is outside only is what he sees. And it is apparent what creature his image is in and that he was formed in a human image.	“Then mould about them outside the likeness of one, that of the man, so that to anyone who is unable [588e] to look within but who can see only the external sheath it appears to be one living creature, the man.”	Next fashion the outside of them into a single image, as of a man, so that he who is not able to look within, and sees only the outer hull, may believe the beast to be a single human creature.
	“The sheath is made fast about him,” he said.	I have done so, he said.
"And I spoke to him who said that there is profit in the doing of injustice for the man. He who does injustice truly does not profit nor	“Let us, then say to the speaker who avers that it pays this man to be unjust, and that to do justice is not for his advantage,	And now, to him who maintains that it is profitable for the human creature to be unjust, and unprofitable to be just,

does he benefit.		
But what is profitable for him is this: that he cast down every image of the evil beast and trample them along with the images of the lion.	that he is affirming nothing else than that it profits him to feast and make strong the multifarious beast and the lion and all that pertains to the lion,	let us reply that, if he be right, it is profitable for this creature to feast the multitudinous monster and strengthen the lion and the lion-like qualities,
But the man is in weakness in this regard. And all the things that he does are weak. As a result he is drawn to the place where he spends time with them. [...].	[589a] but to starve the man and so enfeeble him that he can be pulled about whithersoever either of the others drag him,	but to starve and weaken the man, who is consequently liable to be dragged about at the mercy of either of the other two;
And he [...] to him in[...]. But he brings about [...] enmity [...]. And with strife they devour each other among themselves.	and not to familiarize or reconcile with one another the two creatures but suffer them to bite and fight and devour one another.”	and he is not to attempt to familiarize or harmonize them with one another --he ought rather to suffer them to fight and bite and devour one another.
Yes, all these things he said to everyone who praises the doing of injustice.”	“Yes,” he said, “that is precisely what the panegyrist of injustice will be found to say.”	Certainly, he said; that is what the approver of injustice says.
"Then is it not profitable for him who speaks justly?"	“And on the other hand he who says that justice is the more profitable affirms that	To him the supporter of justice makes answer that
"And if he does these things and speaks in them, within the man they take hold firmly.	all our actions and words should tend to give the man within us [589b] complete domination over the entire man	he should ever so speak and act as to give the man within him in some way or other the most complete mastery over the entire human creature.
Therefore especially he strives to take care of them	and make him take charge of the many-headed beast—	He should watch over the many-headed monster
and he nourishes them just like the farmer nourishes his produce daily.	like a farmer who cherishes and trains the cultivated plants	like a good husbandman, fostering and cultivating the gentle qualities,
And the wild beasts keep it from growing.”	but checks the growth of the wild—	and preventing the wild ones from growing;
	and he will make an ally of the lion's nature, and caring for all the beasts alike will first make them friendly to one another and to himself, and so foster their growth.”	he should be making the lion-heart his ally, and in common care of them all should be uniting the several parts with one another and with himself.

http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/plato.html	http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0168%3Abook%3D9%3Asection%3D588a	http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.10.ix.html
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Now, though, when I look at some sayings in the Gospel of Thomas, it seems as though the author(s) of these sayings did understand the meanings of this passage in Plato's Republic.

5a) Jesus said, "**Recognize what is in your sight, and that which is hidden from you will become plain to you.** [compare "**Then mould about them outside the likeness of one, that of the man, so that to anyone who is unable [588e] to look within but who can see only the external sheath it appears to be one living creature, the man**"]

5b) For there is nothing hidden which will not become manifest."

6b) Jesus said, "**Do not tell lies, and do not do what you hate**, for all things are plain in the sight of Heaven. [compare "**all our actions and words should tend to give the man within us [589b] complete domination over the entire man**"]

6c) For nothing hidden will not become manifest, and nothing covered will remain without being uncovered."

7) Jesus said, "**Blessed is the lion which becomes man when consumed by man; and cursed is the man whom the lion consumes, and the lion becomes man.**" ["Consumed" here seems to correspond to "feast and make strong". Compare "**that he is affirming nothing else than that it profits him to feast and make strong the multifarious beast and the lion and all that pertains to the lion, [589a] but to starve the man and so enfeeble him that he can be pulled about whithersoever either of the others drag him, and not to familiarize or reconcile with one another the two creatures but suffer them to bite and fight and devour one another.**"]

22c) Jesus said to them, "When you make the two one, and **when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside**, and the above like the below, and when you make the male and the female one and the same, so that the male not be male nor the female female;

22d) and when you fashion eyes in the place of an eye, and a hand in place of a hand, and a foot in place of a foot, and a likeness in place of a likeness;

22e) then will you enter [the Kingdom]." [this was the essential point of the passage in Plato, let the rational man tame the beast and the lion inside and so appear a rational man to others on the outside]

45b) **A good man brings forth good from his storehouse; an evil man brings forth evil things from his evil storehouse, which is in his heart, and says evil things.** [this is again an extension of the passage of Plato's Republic].

70) Jesus said, "**If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.**" [ditto]

Sometimes I am not sure whether the Coptic translator misunderstood Plato, or we are misunderstanding him. Perhaps it is the modern critics who are reading Gnostic technical nomenclature into the Coptic translation.

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2013/02/16