

Pious Philosophers. Cosmologies and Religious Identities

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The question of religious identities is often tackled by focusing in particular on individuals or groups that largely imply identities of a civic or ethnic nature. This will not be the focal point of this article. Instead the strategies of religious self-definition of a specific non-ethnic group will be considered. The group in question is actually made up of several groups or schools, namely the philosophers or cosmological writers of antiquity, who belonged to different philosophical movements.

It should be pointed out that the term “identity” used here means the self-definition or self-conception (*Selbstbild* or self-image) that a group of people has and tries to convey, both to themselves internally and to others externally.

When we talk about ancient religion, we often focus on these philosophers because of their critique of traditional myths, superstition and religion *tout court*. But in doing so we often overlook the fact that these philosophers also had a more – if one dare say so – constructive relationship to religion. Instead of interpreting the philosophers’ critique as a kind of anti-religious attitude that anticipates, in some sense, a form of secular thinking (which in my opinion would be a fundamental misinterpretation), I will suggest that the philosophers’ critique and cosmological theories were part of a strategy that also included a construction of a religious identity for themselves and for their followers.

By cosmology I mean doctrines about the cosmos – and hence our conceptions of the

physical realities, that is, of the origins and prime elements of heaven and earth, but also – and in this context more importantly – of the nature of living creatures, especially of human beings, and their place in this world system.

In his well-known narrative about the dream of Scipio, Cicero (106-43 BC) outlines a cosmological system.¹ Of course this is told as a form of mythical narrative, but still in detail it includes various views and explanations, which were common in much of the classical literature on natural philosophy. This cosmological account includes a description of the astronomical structure of the universe, but also an anthropological account of the nature of man and mankind’s place in this universe. According to this, only the body of man is mortal, while the soul, which represents man’s true self is immortal – or actually identical with a divinity, just as everything else that governs or animates a mortal body is a divinity. Just as the highest deity governs the universe and holds the cosmos together, so the human soul governs the human body. Both the soul and God act as the first mover and are therefore themselves self-moving, uncreated and eternal.²

Humans, says Cicero, have received their soul from the gods and from the heavenly bodies whose fire shall burn and whose brilliance endure for all eternity. These heavenly bodies are also “animated by divine reason”. But the soul’s incorporation in the human body is like an imprisonment. This is just a fact of life hu-

1. Cic. *Rep.* 6.9-29.

2. Cic. *Rep.* 6.26-28.

mans have to accept. It is our duty to govern the earth until the time when god, to whom the entire holy heavenly space belongs, sets us free from the body, and that time is when we have done our duty. By taking the path of justice, duty (*pietas*), and virtue (*virtus*) we will be on our way to "the true glory" situated where the heaven shines most brightly (that is the Milky Way) – to a glory with which earthly glory in no way could be compared.³ (Maybe Cicero here had his own earthly disappointments in mind).

We should therefore, says Cicero, practice our own soul in doing the most noble deeds – and we should be aware of the fact that nothing pleases the highest god more than our work on behalf of the human communities – that means the governing of the state and doing service to the fatherland. Those who govern the state are actually sent from or originate in heaven and shall return thither after death, just as Romulus did. Generally, those who "strive outward", that is, beyond themselves and their bodily limits, shall fly home to their true home all the faster. On the other hand, those who revel in earthly pleasures and passions, offend the laws of the gods and of humans and their souls shall flutter in the proximity of the earth for many centuries.⁴

In his works about human aims or goals and duties, Cicero puts forwards the view that man not only has an animalistic nature, but also possesses reason. When reason matures in man, then he will acknowledge that it is through this reason man is in harmony with nature and it is only with the aid of reason that his earthly tasks and happiness can be fulfilled. Only then shall man become conscious of the fact that he is destined to live a way of life that is in accordance or harmony with his own rational nature and understand the value of inner harmony. Only then shall he learn to treasure this "homology" as the true supreme good instead of his first more earthly desires and impulses. This inner harmony, though, constitutes the beauty of the soul where there

will be no contrast between reason and the instincts. This beauty of the soul is what the Greeks always have referred to as the supreme good (beauty), which especially unfolds itself in human communities. As a rational being man is destined to a life lived in human communities.⁵

These passages from Cicero are a wonderful compound of platonic, pythagorean, aristotelean and stoic ideas. Cicero is often described as an eclectic thinker and in his philosophical writings many of the mainstream thoughts of antiquity certainly came together. He might therefore have been a good starting point for the present inquiry. And indeed in these passages we find quite a few key philosophical and religious, cosmological and anthropological issues of antiquity unfolded. First, Cicero supplies a cosmological explanation with his arguments about human nature. Then, based on these premises, he makes certain claims about what goals man should set for himself to fulfil this nature. Only once these goals are attained through the right insight and the right way of living, it is argued, shall happiness be reached. This shall take form as a kind of harmony of the soul in accordance with some higher or divine principle, into which the philosopher – or the wise man – also has the primary insight. This of course always means the one who follows the teachings of a particular philosophical view that represents the true reason.

Let's concentrate on the origins of reason for a moment. To the question of where human reason originated, Cicero might have given an answer based on stoic, platonic and even pythagorean ideas, as we have seen in his account about the dream of Scipio. Certainly if one looks at the stoic view man is the only earthly creature that possesses reason alongside his more animalistic nature. Reason has been given to man by the gods so that he himself will be able to control his bodily impulses and certain parts of his earthly existence. In fact it is reason, and his ability to think, that her alone is able to control. This should there-

3. Cic. *Rep.* 6.14-17, 20, 25.

4. Cic. *Rep.* 6.13, 26, 29 cf. Cic. *Leg.* 2.28. Romulus, 6.24.

5. Cic. *Off.* 1.11-14; Cic. *Fin.* 3.20-21, 26, 64.

fore be his prime concern. By doing so he will be leading a life not only according to his nature, but also to virtue.

Our nature, Chryssippos (280-207 BC) says, is part of the nature of the universe and therefore our goal in life is to live in accordance with the common law that rules both our nature and the universe. *"This law is the right reason, which pervades all things, and which isn't anything else but Zeus, who is the ruler of the cosmic order."* Human happiness depends on the virtue that is drawn from the insight into this world order and that enables humans to live according to the *"mild stream of life"*. This will come true, when everything is done in accordance with the harmony that exists between the *daimon* in each human being and the will of the one who rules the universe.⁶

Reason, or God, is the active and eternal principle in the world. It enables every form of existence to exist at all and nature to be productive. The world is a living being (a god) and reason is a part of the soul of this body. Therefore under the guidance of reason (the ruling part of the soul) the cosmos is ordered with providence and made coherent. So, the universe according to the stoic (and also, indeed, the platonic) view is a living being imbued with reason and soul – and the soul and reason of man are merely part of the universal and divine one.

But how do humans unfold their true happiness? And who are able to do so? Virtue is an attitude that, as we said, is in concord with reason – it is a condition of the soul. But what is important is the fact that it is based on knowledge and insight and therefore can be learned. The one who possesses true wisdom – the wise man or philosopher – has control over his instincts; he knows the measure of "the appropriate" and "the useful". He shows courage, steadfastness, has the right sense of justice and knows what man as a creature determined to live in a political community has to do. As Chryssippos puts it, the good man (the wise man) has the right to be just as proud as Zeus because of his way of life.⁷

The wise man (that is, the philosophical writer) of course also has the proper insight to decide what is the right way of worshipping the gods. Actually he embodies – and that is the first main point I would like to make – the only pure and truly god-fearing form of piety. And this would give him and the followers of the same philosophical school a particular identity – also in religious terms. In fact we often find – and that is my second main point – that the act of reaching the goal of human existence is described and conceptualised in religious terms – not only, as we shall see, among the stoics.

According to Seneca (55BC-37 AD) the right form of piety is based on a right state of mind no matter what character or quality of sacrifice one makes to the gods.⁸ According to his treatise, *On the happy life*, man's happiness depends on the soul discovering what is good for the soul with the aid of reason. This will result in peace of mind, a spiritual harmony with the highest good and freedom from anxieties: a life set free from earthly desires, but with the gain of a unifying force that enables man to live in accordance with his true self – just like God, the ruler of the universe. But man has to establish virtue on solid ground, and this means a state of mind free from earthly anxieties. How else, he writes, can we *"obey god and receive everything that happens in a good state of mind and as a benevolent interpreter of all that happens to him without complaining about our destiny?"* So, in other words, the right way of living and the right state of mind are those that are consonant with piety towards God, the law of nature and the universal order. We should, Seneca enjoins, have the old commandment in mind: *"Follow God"*. This is a holy obligation we owe as mortal beings – *"obeying God is freedom"*.⁹ In that way we shall attain a divine state and reflect God as far as it is religiously allowed. And this the wise man realises, while the mob defends their vices against reason. But the wise man can come to no harm because of attacks from his fellow humans – just

6. ap. Diog. Laërt. 7.87-89; Stob. *Ecl.* 2.75.

7. ap. Plut. *De stoic. repugn.* 13.

8. Sen. *Ben.* 1.6.

9. *Vit. B* 14.3-15.3.

as the gods won't be hurt by the overturning of their altars. The wise man will remain calm before his accusers' rubbish – just as the forever good and almighty Jupiter will remain calm before the follies of the poets. So the wise man was far superior to other people in these matters. According to Seneca, we should actually show veneration not only for virtue itself – as for the gods – but also for its teachers, just as we do for the priests in the temple.¹⁰ And according to Chryssippos, only the souls of the wise would survive until the apocalyptic world fire.¹¹

These forms of arguments and claims of religious superiority are not at all restricted to the stoics, but are in fact very common – almost, one might say, a *topos* – in ancient philosophical literature. I will give a few well-known examples before examining some of them in greater depth.

In the Pythagorean doctrine we find the theory of reincarnation of the soul. By knowing the Pythagorean teachings and following a certain way of life, people could improve their living conditions in the next life – and ultimately be united with the divine. Similar ideas are present in the works of Empedocles and Plato. Philosophical activity of course had a long series of religious connotations and implications in the works of Plato. Philosophy was also seen as a way of being liberated from the cycles of reincarnations and reaching a divine level of existence. Man was supposed to take good care of his most divine possession – namely the divine part of his soul – in order to become “a man of god”. The best way of doing this was by cleansing the soul by following the circular movement of the thoughts of the universe, that is, by practising philosophical or astronomical work, which could lead to divine insight.

With Aristotle we see the basic theory of the form trying to work its way through the matter being applied to human beings. Man is the only creature to have reason (*nous*) included in his soul as a possibility or potential. The human goal or virtue must therefore be to attain

its own ideal form, which implies an actualisation of this possibility of reason. Philosophical and scientific work is central, but in the end the perfect happiness is described both as “*a contemplative activity*”, which is the same activity ascribed to the gods, and as an actual vision of God. And of course the one who honours reason must be “*the one the gods love the most*.¹²

From this high ground, which I have outlined, the philosophers also had the right to criticise what they conceived as the vulgar myths of the poets and the religious practices of the masses. Of course this critique had to be within certain bounds to avoid offending the state religion.

Yet, by making this critique, philosophers developed a kind of theological consensus that cut right across the various schools from Xenophanes to Plotinus. Generally an elevated spiritual concept of God was asserted, and from this high ground the more traditional or popular conceptions could be criticised. State of mind, or contemplation, was also emphasized to some degree, at the expense of outward rituals. I would briefly and very generally stress the following characteristics of the philosophers' concept of God or gods. 1) There is a monotheistic tendency (even though the plural term “gods” is still used) 2) There is a common claim that God/the gods do not have an anthropomorphic character, since that would be contrary to their divinely blissful, eternal or imperishable character or existence. 3) God / the gods could not be the source of evil. That would be contrary to their all-goodness. 4) God / the gods could not be directly influenced or forced through rituals. That would be contrary to their almighty nature 5) There was a critique of certain rituals because of what was conceived as improper features – e.g. the use of blood (Pythagoreans and others would have this reservation), but also because of the above-mentioned emphasis on the gods' almighty nature. 6) There was an emphasis on the worshipper's state of mind, as mentioned

10. *Vit. B* 26.5ff.

11. Diog. Laërt. 7.156ff.

12. Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1178a1-1179b1.

before, and not least 7) it was claimed that myths could not convey God's or the gods' true nature, even though they could hold some truth. Some of the myths were downright ungodly because they often conveyed stories about the gods contrary to the afore-cited claims.

Since to hold conceptions other than the claims mentioned above would often be characterized as ungodly or blasphemous, these philosophical or theological positions would also, in some sense, contribute to set the philosophers apart from the rest of society, religiously speaking. But of course, what kind of implications these claims had for the different schools, and to what extremes they carried them, varied highly. For example, to the stoics the all-goodness of the gods meant that the gods *had* to be involved in earthly affairs. But the epicureans claimed, on the contrary, that the gods could not be so involved, because being involved in the world would mean that they had to bother, and that would be contrary to their blissfulness. So there was indeed controversy, but within a certain framework, a wider consensus.

But instead of going into this controversy, I would like to give one interesting example of this religious critique – a critique which could also be seen as a form of religious identity-making. When talking about religious matters, the peripatetic philosopher Theophrastus (370-288 BC) is best known for his satire about the superstitious man. But Theophrastus far from denied the reality of intervening gods or even demons – and he actually wrote quite a few books on religious topics, which strangely enough don't receive as much attention as his satire. In his partly preserved work *On Piety* (*Peri Eusebeias*¹³), Theophrastus explains how the Egyptians, the most rational (!) of all people, from the beginning of time made a sacrifice of the first fruits to the heavenly gods by burning sprouts, seeds, grass, leafs and roots. Through this sort of sacrifice they hailed the visible heavenly gods (the heavenly bodies) and through the sacrificial fire and smoke they gave them

eternal honours. The maintenance of this correct form of sacrifice was ensured by the fact that everyone who violated the rules would be cursed. But as time went by human life and human diet became more diversified and therefore the sacrifices given to the gods also became varied, bigger and more comprehensive, until one day mankind started to practice the most outrageous and terrible sacrifices, namely the bloody ones, where animals were sacrificed. Therefore the ancient curse was activated and from then on mankind has been haunted by wars and famine. Furthermore all the forms of ungodliness came into the world. Some people totally stopped making the original and obligatory sacrifices and therefore were punished by the gods. Others even took to human sacrifices and cannibalism.

Therefore, Theophrastus says, those who wants to be pious, should not sacrifice living creatures. To our greatest patrons, the gods, we owe the most honourable gifts. The gods have given man crops and fruits, and therefore we should honour them through these things. It would be unfitting to hurt anybody during a sacrifice. Furthermore, no one should sacrifice anything stolen from somebody else. Therefore, innocent animals should not be sacrificed, because by doing so we would rob them of their most precious possession, namely their soul. Instead we should sacrifice sprouts and seeds, which the plants give to the whole of mankind of their own free will and which are cheap and easy to produce through one's own efforts. Sacrifices like these would please the gods, who would consider the character of the person making the sacrifice more than the size of the sacrifice he brings in the first place. If a man makes the right and proper sacrifices to honour the gods, to thank them or to ask for help, what counts is not that he has a clean body or white raiment, but that he has a clean soul and holy thoughts. By these pure sacrifices to the divinity, man can attain holiness and help from the gods, including from earth itself, from which everything originates, and from the heavenly gods, who share the responsibility for the crops.

13. Frg. 584A (Fortenbaugh).

Theophrastus' views on these specific matters were presumably derived from the Pythagorean ideas or perhaps from the teachings of Empedocles. Perhaps we should not expect to find these feelings of religious superiority among, for example, the cynics or the epicureans. But nonetheless, let's take a closer look. According to the cynics, man ought to live an independent life "according to nature". This would be the easiest way through life for mortals. In continuation of this, man should distance himself not only from riches and possessions, but also from disturbing superstitions. At the same time Diogenes of Sinope (400-325 BC) complained that humans do not ask for what is truly good when they pray to the gods. *"The gods have given humans an easy life, but they have lost sight of this, because they demand cakes with honey, ointments and such."*¹⁴ We should live a simple life without riches, "because", says Diogenes, *"to need nothing is peculiar to the gods and to need very little is the privilege of those who resemble the gods."* For good men are like images of the gods.¹⁵

Epicurus (341-270 BC) has a similar approach. There are, he taught, two kinds of happiness. The greatest and never-changing one *"belongs with the gods"* while the other (the human one) can vary in size, when it comes to pleasures.¹⁶ God is *"a living creature who is imperishable (eternal) and blissful."*¹⁷ So what life should man live? He ought to cultivate *"a state of bodily health and the imperturbability of the soul"* (ataraxia). From this it follows that the wise man who has wisdom (phronésis), after sound consideration should seek natural pleasure (hédoné) and avoid pains. This positive assessment of pleasure was also found among the cynics, but according to Epicurus this was not a matter of *"debauched pleasures and all kinds of gluttony"* because then the pursuit of this would cause a new disturbance of the soul. The goal merely was *"neither to feel pain in the body nor feel anxiety in the soul."*¹⁸

The soul is, according to Epicurus, like anything else, a physical entity and is composed of very fine particles (atoms) spread all over the body with which it is *"in touch and sympathy"*. It is both movable and moves other things itself. Most of all it resembles a warm stream of air. Still, there exists an even more easily moved part, which is the basis of our mental abilities, feelings and thoughts. This is also responsible for perception and the function of life.¹⁹ When it leaves the body it results in death. After this the soul will be dissolved, because it has no independent being (existence) or perception without the body. The wise should therefore not fear death nor strive for immortality. For humans there is no individual existence after death, and therefore neither any perception or pain, nor anything else terrible.²⁰

If man were to understand and follow the teachings of Epicurus, he would avoid conceptions that disturb the soul. He should especially avoid having the wrong conception about God/the gods – that is to fear them. We should only conceive God as *"a living creature, who is imperishable (eternal) and blissful"* just as the *"common conception"* also tells us. Like the atoms, and the universe, the gods are imperishable, while everything else is dissolved as time goes by. We should not therefore give the gods characteristics that are contrary to the fact that they are eternal, unchangeable and blissful. *"For certainly the gods exist, the comprehension of them is obvious"*, but the common masses have misunderstood the divine: they have attached all kinds of misconceptions to the gods – and these misconceptions are not only false but also impious.²¹

One of these misconceptions is that the gods are involved in earthly affairs. This cannot, taught Epicurus, be true because of their *"incorruptible and blissful nature"*. And because of this there is nothing about the gods *"that can cause doubt or disturbance"* for humans. God

14. ap. Diog. Laërt. 6.44.

15. ap. Diog. Laërt. 6.37f., 51, 72, 104.

16. ap. Diog. Laërt. 10.121.

17. ap. Diog. Laërt. 10.123f.

18. ap. Diog. Laërt. 2.86ff.; 10.117, 127ff., 131ff., 136-138;

KD 3 (Diog. Laërt. 10.139).

19. ap. Diog. Laërt. 10.63-68.

20. ap. Diog. Laërt. 10.124ff., cf. KD 2, 28 (Diog. Laërt. 10.139, 148); Epicurus, *Sent. Vat.* 14.

21. ap. Diog. Laërt. 10.123f.

can neither have worries nor cause them to anybody else – nor can God be influenced by either anger or by benevolence.²²

Despite that, Epicurus advises his followers to take joy in the festivals and put up statues – that is, to take part in traditional religious practice. They should, he enjoins, “*piously make sacrifices when it's appropriate*”, but without causing “*confusion because of the common opinions about the supreme*”.²³

He goes on to say that no one “*is mightier than the man who thinks piously about the gods and is absolutely fearless about death*.”²⁴ The wise man laughs at destiny and rejects a deterministic view of life. He also rejects the notion that coincidence (Tyche) could be a god. For nothing disorderly could be done by a god. Instead man should just realize that [certain things happens because of necessity other things by coincidence] things happen either by coincidence or because of our free will and own efforts. And all in all “*it is stupid to ask the gods for anything we could have provided ourselves*.”²⁵

But the blissful life of the gods still constitutes an ideal in the epicurean system. So man should respect and admire them. In this care-free manner, without any pains in the soul, the wise lives “*as a god among men, for a man who lives with eternal goods does not seem like a mortal being*.” The same superhuman qualities apply when Epicurus claims that the wise man, just like the gods, “*neither causes worries for himself nor for his fellow human being*.”²⁶

The Roman epicureans went to great length to argue that the teachings of Epicurus did not lead to blasphemous acts. In fact it was the fear of gods that led such acts, whereas the epicurean doctrine represented the pure piety. It is not pious, Lucretius says in his treatise *On Nature*, to stand before altars of stone with a covered head reeling off promises: piety, rather, is being able to face everything with a

serene mind and the right insight – in this way the soul could live an existence worthy of the gods.²⁷ For his part he tells us that the teachings of Epicurus had filled him with a “*divine joy*”. It had led him to a vision of the peaceful dwelling of the blissful gods – a dwelling outside the wall of fire that surrounds the world and where nothing destructive could touch the gods or influence their blissfulness.²⁸ This parallels his description of the wise man, who lives high above fear and anxiety behind a secure entrenchment, from which he could look down upon all the other poor and blind people.²⁹

So the correct reverence of the gods would be to cleanse the soul from fear “*which is a stigma on the gods and alien to our peace of mind*.” For we actually diminish the “*holy power of the gods*” by thoughts of that kind. Of course we will not be punished for it, because the gods cannot be offended or violated owing to their eternal blissfulness.³⁰ But if you don't take a stand against the fear of the gods “*you will not be able to set foot in a temple with peace in your heart, and likewise the 'images' that fly towards our consciousness from the supremely divine body, and that tell us what the gods look like, you would not receive with devotion in your soul*.”³¹ That is the right devotion of course.

Even rituals would not be able to be performed in the right way without the epicurean insight. So Philodemus (110-35 BC) tells us. His work *On piety* was found among the texts in Herculaneum and is partly preserved.³² In this he defends Epicurus against attacks for various forms of impiety and repeats the arguments that it is the enemies of Epicurus with their misconceptions about the gods who are the ungodly ones. Likewise he rejects as utter nonsense the notion that epicureans only perform rituals not out of inner conviction but only out of social convention. Epicurus, Phi-

22. ap. Diog. Laërt. 10.78; *KD* 1 (Diog. Laërt. 10.139).

23. Frg. 57 (Bailey).

24. ap. Diog. Laërt. 10.132f.

25. ap. Diog. Laërt. 10.133ff.; Epicurus, *Sent. Vat.* 9, 65.

26. ap. Diog. Laërt. 10.135; Epicurus, *Sent. Vat.* 79.

27. 1.62-79; 1.102-146; 1194-1240; 3.51-54, 73-75, 320ff.;

4.1233-1239.

28. 3.28ff.

29. 2.1-19 cf. 3.18-24, 28ff.; 5.146-155.

30. 1.80-100; 6.68-78.

31. 6.75-78.

32. Ed. D. Obbink, Oxford (1996).

lodemus tells us, “*loyally observed all forms of worship and enjoined his friends to observe them, not only on account of the laws but for physical reasons (causes) as well (dia fyseikas aitias). For in On Lifecourses he says that to pray is natural for us, not because the gods would be hostile if we did not pray, but in order that, according to the understanding of beings surpassing in power and excellence, we may realize our (or their) fulfilments and social conformity with the laws. [...] For every wise man holds pure and holy beliefs about the divine and has understood that this nature is great and august. And it is particularly at festivals that he, progressing to an understanding of it, by constantly having its name on his lips, embraces it with conviction more seriously...*”³³ So, according to Epicurus: “*let us sacrifice justly [...] for in this way it is possible for mortal nature, by Zeus, to live like Zeus, as it seems.*”³⁴

Philodemus goes on to quote Epicurus and earlier epicureans for their positive attitude towards religion, rites, prayer, purifications, and so on. But he also stresses that it is only those with the right way of living who would derive anything positive from the rites – i.e. those who imitate the blessedness of the gods (so far as mortals can), those who are noble in mind, those who do harm to no one, who are grateful for past benefits and fortified against natural pains and death. So: “*Pious is the person who preserves the immortality and consummate blessedness of God together with all the things included (or attached) by us (that is: characteristics attributed to the gods by the epicureans); but impious is the person who banishes either where God is concerned.*”³⁵ Therefore the treatises of the epicureans are “*the best and most holy, must worthy of emulation, having dominion over all good things, unburdened by affairs, and exalted and great-minded and great-spirited and ritually pure and purest and propitious. [...] They alone strive after the greatest form of*

piety and they hold the most pious views about the gods,” contrary to others who teach against them and contrary to the populace who regard them as impious, as the Athenians wrongly regarded Socrates.³⁶

Let us recapitulate. I think we can identify a common modus operandi of the cosmological writers belonging to different philosophical schools. These writers construct different cosmological and philosophical systems with religion. But they commonly attribute coherence to these systems. By giving mankind a special place and nature, tasks and goals in this world system, they inevitably also helped to give themselves and their followers a religious identity.

The wise man, they taught, was the one with the right form of insight and wisdom – or, to be more precise, most philosophical schools would claim the wise man was the follower of a particular set of teachings, namely their own teachings. But the reasons for the wise man to pursue their tasks and goals were not only strictly philosophical in nature but indeed also religious. He who attained the defined goals of human life would also fulfil the right form of piety. In this way the philosophical trendsetters could maintain an image or identity of themselves as the truly pious and god-fearing ones as opposed to other philosophical schools and the masses. In this we find a sense of superiority which manifests itself in the right of interpreting and judging religious matters – myths, rituals and theological thoughts. The wise and pious are seen as those who have attained the highest position in the cosmos whose structure the philosophers had formulated or postulated themselves. In that way we can certainly say that they had constructed or tried to maintain a religious identity of their own – or at least demarcated a space in religious life where they could claim superiority for themselves.

33. Euseb. 730-772, cf. 630ff.

34. Euseb. 890-892.

35. Euseb. 1138ff.

36. Euseb. 1077-1305; 1665ff. Cf. 173ff.; 1127ff.; 1160ff.; 1852ff.; 2178ff.