

## Conatus - Journal of Philosophy

Vol 8, No 1 (2023)

Conatus - Journal of Philosophy



**Anthony A. Long. Selfhood and Rationality in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Heraclitus to Plotinus. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022.**

*Despina Vertzagia*

doi: [10.12681/cjp.34784](https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.34784)

Copyright © 2023, Despina Vertzagia



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

### To cite this article:

Vertzagia, D. (2023). Anthony A. Long. Selfhood and Rationality in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Heraclitus to Plotinus. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. *Conatus - Journal of Philosophy*, 8(1), 339–353.  
<https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.34784>

# Anthony A. Long. *Selfhood and Rationality in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Heraclitus to Plotinus*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022.

## Despina Vertzagia

*National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece*

*E-mail address:* [dvertzagia@philosophy.uoa.gr](mailto:dvertzagia@philosophy.uoa.gr)

*ORCID iD:* <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7894-8657>

### Abstract

*Anthony A. Long's recent book, Selfhood and Rationality in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Heraclitus to Plotinus (2022), is a collection of fourteen essays that explore the themes of selfhood and rationality in ancient Greek philosophy. Long's book provides an illuminating account of the vast ancient Greek tradition and an engaging tour that begins with pre-Socratic thought and ends with Stoicism and Neoplatonism seeking answers to the multifaceted question of the rational self, its emergence and evolution within Greek antiquity.*

**Keywords:** *A. A. Long; selfhood; rationality; identity; eudaimonia; soul; divinity; antiquity*

Anthony A. Long's aim in this book, which is mainly a collection of previously published essays, is extremely complex: to explore the multi-layered and multi-dimensional concepts of *selfhood* and *rationality* (explicitly defined and discussed in modern philosophy) as they are presented in Greek antiquity, or as they originally arose. Concepts such as these can only lead one into an intellectual maze and reveal the meaning of many other concepts and terms that permeate ancient Greek thought and require thorough revisiting, such as *soul*, *eudaimonia*, and *divinity*. Finally, Long's book provides a concise account of the extensive ancient Greek tradition and a masterful tour that begins with pre-

Socratic thought and ends with Stoicism and Neoplatonism. However, this book cannot be considered a mere introduction to Greek thought, as it contains critical essays as well as essays that discuss technical issues, alongside original interpretative pieces that require adequate familiarity with Greek literature and a sufficient background knowledge of the concepts with which these essays deal, although Long always strives to present his material in a way that might appeal to a general audience. In any case, this book's insight and clarity make it accessible to all readers.

This book is a collection of thirteen essays written between 1992 and 2021, as well as one previously unpublished essay. It is not only a testament to the author's profound knowledge of the Greek antiquity, but also reveals something about the author himself: Long's devotion to the concept of *the self*, which is central to multi-conceptual ancient Greek literature. Long has already explicitly shared this devotion with his readership in his previous book, *Greek Models of Mind and Self* (2015), where he confesses:

I drafted my lectures specifically for these occasions, but their topic, ancient Greek models of mind and self, has engaged me closely throughout my life as a teacher and scholar. Decades ago I undertook to write a book with this title for Harvard University Press. Over the years I published a large number of articles on the subject in specialist journals, but the book itself eluded me. More than once I started to fulfill my old contract, but the complexity and scope of the subject were too daunting for me to complete the project.<sup>1</sup>

The book is divided into fourteen chapters. The reader should keep in mind that while each chapter is a self-contained experience, it is also part of a larger project, namely, the search for an answer to the multifaceted question of the rational self. The first three chapters are a general exploration of this problem in Greek literature. Beginning in Chapter 4, Long focuses on particular historical moments of Greek antiquity or on particular thinkers, considering their place and contribution to the seven centuries of the history of Greek ideas and relating ancient Greek philosophy to modern discussions of the self and identity. In this book, Long demonstrates in a highly characteristic way that ancient Greek philosophy should always be treated as *terra incognita*, while it remains always relevant because of its inexhaustible intellectual and conceptual fertility. This book review

---

<sup>1</sup> Anthony A. Long, *Greek Models of Mind and Self* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2015), ix-x.

focuses on the three introductory chapters of the book, while it offers an overview of the rest eleven chapters that constitute an enlightening journey through the history of Greek thought seeking the emergence and the evolution of the concept of the rational self.

## I. The Self: Between Rationality and Divinity

### Chapter 1: Finding Oneself in Greek Philosophy

Chapter 1 is an introduction to Long's project: he goes back to antiquity to redefine the concept of self. The ancient Greeks were the first to formulate a concept of the self, or, as the author himself says, they "activated an entire aspect of the self that had been mainly latent before."<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter, Long discusses *inter alia* several methodological issues, to illustrate how he navigates the history of philosophy and why he seeks a connection between our contemporary concerns and ancient teachings that are so distant from us in time, space, and culture. He argues that interpretation is a dynamic and interrogative process<sup>3</sup> and accepts the fact that the historian of ideas, like any historian, inevitably changes his focus according to his contemporary interests and framework. This belief is also confirmed in Chapter 2, where Long moves from the metaphor of Greek philosophy as the cultural root of Western civilization to the metaphor that portrays Greek philosophy as an inherited house full of rooms, levels, and passages that we visit from time to time, choosing different pieces to look at, use, or incorporate into our historical contexts.<sup>4</sup> On this point, Long remains in the constellation of what Max Weber called "Wertbezüge." In his effort not to be anachronistic, he does not fall into the historicist fallacy, i.e., a) he does not believe that ancient thought should be read exclusively in terms of the *Weltanschauung* of its particular time and culture – he looks for superhistorical or intertemporal ideas in ancient Greek literature, b) he does not believe that we can understand the authors better than they understood themselves if we start from our historical consciousness.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the methodological aspects offered by this chapter, Long's primary concern in this chapter is to argue that we can discern in ancient Greek thought an objective conception of the self, or a rational

---

<sup>2</sup> Antony A. Long, *Selfhood and Rationality in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Heraclitus to Plotinus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 9

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

agent, who distances himself from his personal perspectives and who interacts with the world in ways that we now call *scientific*. Long argues that Thomas Nagel's notion of an *objective self*<sup>6</sup> that coexists with our ordinary human individuality is not a post-Cartesian notion, but actually arose in pre-Socratic thought through doubt of religious authority or the so-called *discovery of nature*, a moment identified with the birth of philosophy. Long surveys the emergence of natural philosophy and asserts that this new understanding of the world "brought with it a new dimension of the self."<sup>7</sup> He focuses primarily on Heraclitus and his attempt to arrive at an objective view of the world by distinguishing between the surface and deep structure of the world,<sup>8</sup> while striving for self-transcendence: *ἐδιζήσάμην ἐμεωυτόν*.<sup>9</sup> Heraclitus, despite the historical gulf that separates him from Nagel, fulfills the conditions of the objective self, as a pure scientific self, through his definition of *σωφροσύνη*: "σωφρονεῖν ἀρετὴ μέγιστη, καὶ σοφίη ἀληθέα λέγειν καὶ ποιεῖν κατὰ φύσιν ἐπαίοντας."<sup>10</sup> In Heraclitus, Long points out, *σωφροσύνη* goes in part beyond its traditional meaning, that is, beyond human limitations or modesty, for "Heraclitus has a concept of the self that breaches the traditional distinction between human and divine."<sup>11</sup> After a brief, though profound, account of Plato's and Aristotle's misinterpretation of Heraclitus,<sup>12</sup> Long turns to Marcus Aurelius' conception of the self as an application of Heraclitus' concept: Marcus understands himself as part of the world, which he defines both as community and nature. By placing himself in a cosmic perspective and locating himself in a combination of opposites, Marcus objectivity "presents him with a sense of his responsibility, his autonomy, his being a contributor to a social system."<sup>13</sup> Long concludes that we can learn from the ancients regarding our twofold self that "we have an objective self, but we are highly [...] subjective in how we exercise it."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), mainly 54-67.

<sup>7</sup> Long, *Selfhood and Rationality*, 14.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 16-17. See his Heraclitus' references, especially DK B123.

<sup>9</sup> DK B101. Quoted in Long, *Selfhood and Rationality*, 18.

<sup>10</sup> DK B112. Quoted in Long, *Selfhood and Rationality*, 19.

<sup>11</sup> Long, *Selfhood and Rationality*, 20.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 20-21

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 24.

## Chapter 2: Ancient Philosophy's Hardest Question: What to Make of Oneself?

In Chapter 2, Long focuses on the rule of reason as a prerequisite for happiness in ancient Greek philosophy. The entire chapter focuses on the juxtaposition of the tragic view of man and morality with the philosophical concepts of reason and autonomy.

The question "What to Make of Oneself" is called by Long the "self-model question,"<sup>15</sup> and he treats it as a supra-historical, eternal question relevant to all kinds of human activity. Long emphasizes that the question of human identity in the ancient Greek worldview is very complex. It encompasses both what one is and what one might be, and refers simultaneously to one's cognitive and practical status.<sup>16</sup> It is therefore inseparable from the question of the good life, because *is* and *ought* were not yet separate at the time. The question of *ought*, the ethical question, is closely related to the search for happiness, *εὐδαιμονία*. The same question has both psychological and theological significance, as man seeks to approach the divine through *ἀρετή*. Long traces the complexity and multi-dimensionality of this question in the first part of this chapter in a very clear and simple way, since this chapter is addressed to a general audience. However, by framing it as comprehensibly as possible, he underscores its central and crucial character.

In this chapter, Long emphasizes the distance that separates our worldview – and thus our conceptual understanding – from the ancient worldview. He insists that we must make a decisive break with the conceptual framework of our modern tradition (e.g., monotheism, human rights theory, etc.) in order to understand the *self-model question* as it was approached by the ancients. In this chapter, Long attempts to explain the concept of divinity in the ancient Greek worldview in the context of the pursuit of happiness or eudaimonia. Eudaimonia, however, was not viewed in theological terms in ancient Greek philosophy: Eudaimonia is a goal that lies within our individual, rational, and intellectual powers. In this sense, the ancients considered reason as our "internal divinity."<sup>17</sup> Against this background, philosophy stands on the opposite side of tragedy, or, as Long emphatically asserts, "the ancient philosophical tradition, with the exception of Aristotle, had the audacity, or insensitivity, to occlude tragedy,"<sup>18</sup> because in tragedy "we get the

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 31.

impression that human happiness, and autonomy, and the rewards for justice are a snare and delusion.”<sup>19</sup>

### Chapter 3: Eudaimonism, Divinity and Rationality in Greek Ethics

In Chapter 3, Long develops and expands the ideas presented in the previous chapters. This chapter begins with a dialogue between Long and Julia Annas (any dialogue between these two thinkers would be extremely beneficial for the reader) about her well-known work *The Morality of Happiness*.<sup>20</sup> Although Long praises Annas’ work as a study “that keeps our subject vibrant and stimulating,”<sup>21</sup> he disagrees with her views. The content of this chapter is presented by Long as “directly questioning of the affinity Annas finds between ancient ethics and modern morality.”<sup>22</sup> His main disagreement with Annas relates to the concept of eudaimonia: Long maintains, contrary to Annas’ view, that eudaimonia is neither a weak nor a non-specific concept.

To support his claim, Long turns to the history of the concept of divinity in archaic Greek culture, in Socrates-Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus,<sup>23</sup> and to the etymology of the word *daimon*.<sup>24</sup> He argues that Greek philosophers were attracted to the multiple connotations of the term *daimon*: divinity, fate and monitoring spirit.<sup>25</sup> Long then focuses on the use of the term *daimon* in Hesiod, Heraclitus, Pindar, Empedocles, and Democritus.<sup>26</sup> The diverse Presocratic concepts of divinity are briefly examined in the third part of this chapter, in contrast to part 4, which is devoted entirely to the Platonic concept of daimon, which, according to Long, is “far too rich and complex to be discussed completely.”<sup>27</sup>

Daimon in platonic texts, as Long observes, is strongly connected with rationality, knowledge, self’s identity, and autonomous happiness (eudaimonia). Daimon takes the form of the rational self, while in the same time Plato preserves its theological connotations, since the

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>20</sup> See Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (New York, and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>21</sup> Long, *Selfhood and Rationality*, 41.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 43-46.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 47.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 48-50.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 50.

rational subject of Plato is still considered as “the voice of god.”<sup>28</sup> Long chooses cautiously the platonic passages of the *Symposium*, *Timaeus* and *Republic*, giving a comprehensive and clear overview of one of the most complex platonic concepts.

At the end of this chapter, Long explores the affinities between Platonic and Stoic concepts of eudaimonism, noting the similarities between Plato and (both early and Roman) Stoicism in their focus on “pursuing eudaimonia by identifying oneself entirely with the rationality that we potentially share with divinity.”<sup>29</sup> To fully understand these concepts, Long reemphasizes the methodological premise for a valid interpretation of antiquity: Our greatest challenge is to capture a conceptual framework that is alien to our modern worldview.<sup>30</sup>

## II. From Heraclitus to Plotinus

In Chapter 4, Long introduces Heraclitus as the father of the concept of rationality, focusing on his analysis of pre-existing concepts, especially the concept of measure, and he explores the multiple applications of the concept of measure in Heraclitus’ thought by making the connection between Heraclitus’ cosmological and psychological theories. Heraclitus’ discovery, Long argues, was “how to articulate rationality in terms of measured or proportional processes both in non-animate nature, and in mental disposition and conduct.”<sup>31</sup> Long examines the idea of rationality in Heraclitus’ thought through the influence of later philosophy and Plato in particular. Thus, much of this chapter is devoted to Platonic concepts of cosmic order, measure, and sophrosyne, tracing echoes of Heraclitus in Plato, as opposed to the conventional interpretation that associates Plato primarily with Pythagoreanism, Empedocles, and Parmenides. Long discusses Heraclitus’ contribution to rational inquiry and its indirect relevance to Platonic and Stoic notions of rationality, while also commenting on the aphoristic and cryptic nature of Heraclitus’ fragments. Significantly, Long asserts that

When [Heraclitus] is quite mysterious – as for instance in B62, “immortal mortals, mortal immortals [...]” the riddle is philosophically motivated. He takes on the role of the Delphic oracle in order to challenge his audience to come up

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 60.



with their own interpretation of his remarks, so as to rethink the traditional disjunction between mortal and immortal beings.<sup>32</sup>

In Chapter 5, Long deals with Parmenides in a manner similar to Heidegger: he tries to avoid anachronism and to internalize the direction of his thought.<sup>33</sup> Long argues that Parmenides was not a metaphysician, at least not primarily, and his central question was not on the Being, but on the *thinking* being, i.e., mind. This chapter is quite technical and detailed. It focuses on the much discussed DK28 B3: “τό γάρ αὐτό νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καί εἶναι,” and the two prevailing translations and interpretations of its meaning. The first “posits a tie of sameness between cognition – actively thinking/knowing – and being/reality,”<sup>34</sup> while the second postulates “identity between what is thinkable and what is capable of being.”<sup>35</sup> Long examines the arguments (mainly those of Francis M. Cornford)<sup>36</sup> against the identity of mind and being and the perception of being as mindless, as well as some other fragments of Parmenides that defend the position that the source and object of thought are identical. His conclusion is similar to the one of Gregory Vlastos. However, he points out the weaknesses of Vlastos’ view, arguing that “if we detach the activity of thinking from belonging to Being as its own property, Parmenides’ entire methodology becomes incoherent.”<sup>37</sup> After his brief outline of Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Empedocles, and Anaxagoras, Long asserts that most early Greek philosophers regarded thought, cognition, and mind as fundamental properties of reality. Long is not content with this statement, however, and turns again to Parmenides’ text to prove that “thinking is internal to and bounded by Being.”<sup>38</sup>

Chapter 6 is a genuine contribution to the Socratic problem. The question that guides Long’s reflections is whether “Socrates set out to stage himself,”<sup>39</sup> or the possibility of a self-fashioning on behalf of Socrates. In other words, was Plato trying to present a particularly dramatic figure as a new anthropotype and a new way of life? Plato, as Long puts it,

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 74-75.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 76-77.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>36</sup> See Francis MacDonald Cornford, *Plato and Parmenides* (London: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>37</sup> Long, *Selfhood and Rationality*, 86.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 98.

was not only responsible for publicizing Socrates as the earliest so-called philosopher, he also transmitted our most memorable images of Socrates as gad-fly, obsessive pederast, Silenus faced, poorly clad, bare footed, and so forth.<sup>46</sup>

Or, more precisely, did Socrates,

deliberately cultivated a quite new personal style, perhaps exploiting, as Plato does on his behalf, the contrast between inner beauty of soul and unattractive face and body?<sup>47</sup>

Long focuses on the literary persona and dramatic character of Platonic Socrates as he appeared within the dramatic framework of the Platonic dialogues, far from being sanctified, and compares the notable features of this Socrates image with those of the fifth-century Sophists and the unconventional, hence instrumental, exhibitionism of Diogenes of Sinope. Using this illustration, Long attempts to illuminate the possibility of autonomous (i.e., rational) and intentional self-fashioning in ancient Greek thought and literature.

Chapter 7 focuses on the Socratic *daimonion* question, a distinctive feature of Socrates that cannot be ignored in Socratic scholarship. Long examines this remarkable and controversial experience of Socrates and his commitment to the exhortations of the divine sign. He seeks to detect whether the divine sign lies outside or within the sphere of rationality. By co-examining Plutarch's *De genio Socratis*, Long contends that the Socratic daimonion is the coinage of the indissoluble connection between divinity and reason. According to Long, there are many perspectives from which the divine sign can be examined. However, he chooses three of them for his investigation. First, he attempts to determine the connection between Socrates' descriptions of the experience of the divine sign and his philosophical and theological doctrines and methods.<sup>40</sup> Long considers both Gregory Vlastos'<sup>41</sup> and Mark McPherran's<sup>42</sup> views on the rationality or extra-rationality of the divine sign. Long briefly but thoroughly examines whether the divine sign is more than a hunch

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 111-113.

<sup>41</sup> See Gregory Vlastos, *Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

<sup>42</sup> See Mark McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

and whether Socrates' rationality and religiosity are compatible with this experience.<sup>51</sup> He then turns to Plutarch and *De genio Socratis* to sketch the second perspective of the Socratic daimonion, the way it actually appears in the Socratic mind or the psychological nature of this experience, as well as the third perspective, the historical and cultural context of its appearance. Taking all these aspects into account, Long understands the daimonion as the essential Socratic link between divinity and rationality, or the representation of Socrates' self-knowledge and magnanimity (in Aristotle's sense): "Socrates was remarkable and knew himself to be so,"<sup>43</sup> and "what is remarkable in Greek culture typically fell into divine domain."<sup>44</sup> According to Long, Socrates sought to fulfill his destiny of becoming as godlike as possible via the *daimonion* (ὁμοίωσιν θεῶ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν).<sup>45</sup>

In Chapter 8, Long examines Socrates' rationality and the formation of the self in the context of Plato's *Republic*. In this context, Long examines the role of divinity in the Platonic corpus and concludes to identify the Platonic notion of divinity with the Form of the Good. This is a radical and provocative interpretation that contradicts the traditional Anglo-American reading, which understands the Platonic god as the highest kind of soul (ψυχή). For Plato, souls, though eternal, are in constant self-motion, and in this respect differ from static, unchanging Forms. This notion results primarily from a selective focus on *Timaeus* and the *Laws*, as well as from the "comfortable [...] notion of a divine and beneficial creator."<sup>46</sup> Another reason why Long's view might be viewed with suspicion is the tendency to associate divinity with an intellect or νοῦς.<sup>47</sup> After all, Long himself notes that Plato's later focus was on the divine intellect, not the obscure concept of the Form of the Good. But as Long concludes:

Goodness, beauty and stability are the essential attributes of divinity in [Plato's] understanding of the *theion* throughout. They are paradigmatically instantiated in the Form of Good: that is to say, harmony, proportion, teleology, and mathematical structure actually are Plato's divinity in its highest manifestation.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Long, *Selfhood and Rationality*, 119.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*, 176b 5-6.

<sup>46</sup> Long, *Selfhood and Rationality*, 142.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 143.

Although Long did not explore the Platonic soul ( $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ ) in his previous chapter on divinity, he devotes Chapter 9 to this particular concept. He argues that conventional translations of  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$  are largely misleading because they fail to reveal the breadth and depth of this Platonic concept. According to Long, the Platonic  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$  is semantically more closely related to (but by no means identical with) the modern concept of *person* than with the modern concepts of soul or mind. His main contention is that  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$  enables the human being to act like a person, i.e., to act intentionally, rationally, morally, and autonomously, and to have desires and feelings of joy and sorrow, since “rationality and desire for objective goodness are properties of psyche at its best.”<sup>49</sup> On this basis, he argues that Plato’s psychology “was strongly motivated by a wish to establish the credentials of a concept that we can liken to the concept of person.”<sup>50</sup> Taking into account the approaches of John Locke, Daniel Dennett, and Harry Frankfurt to the concept of personhood, Long contends that the Platonic soul seems to confer on humans the ability to live as persons in a sense similar to how personhood is understood by modern thinkers.<sup>51</sup> As a historian of ideas, Long could not help but mention the origins of the concept of  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$  and the dualistic treatment of body and soul, by returning to Homer and Isocrates, respectively, before delving into his interpretive analysis of the Platonic soul as an agent of personhood. Despite the important insights we can find in the Platonic corpus regarding personhood, however, Long stresses that we should keep in mind the teleological worldview of the Platonic universe that prevents us from identifying with a Platonic soul: Plato’s soul is a strictly normative concept, existing for the sake of love of truth and beauty, and striving for its perfection or likeness to the divine.<sup>52</sup> However, if divinity is identical with the Form of the Good, as argued in the previous chapter, Long’s analysis could lead to the conclusion that the ultimate goal of the Platonic soul is to cease to exist as a moving soul and to transform itself into a completely static and objective Form. In this sense, the body and the properties that Plato attributes to it are the reason that Platonic souls did not disappear from the Platonic universe.

The concept of divinity becomes even more complicated when one considers the next chapter, which outlines the idea of the *divine*

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 147-149.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 155-160.

*craftsman*. Long argues that Plato, followed by the Stoics, transforms the impersonal rationality of Heraclitus, as presented in Chapter 4, into a providential creator. In this chapter, Long explains the differences between the Platonic and Stoic conceptions of cosmic craftsmanship, particularly in terms of their practical and emotional efficacy: Unlike Platonism, Stoicism succeeds in reconciling human beings with this world by offering a more political and anthropocentric conception of divine craftsmanship. As Long puts it, “Plato politicized the human mind with his injunctions to put reason rather than passion in charge of our lives; but he did not conceptualize the created world as a polity.”<sup>53</sup>

In Chapter 11, Long examines the divine qualities of Aristotle’s νοῦς and argues that although contemplative life (βίος θεωρητικός) is the highest form of life for Aristotle, the divine character of the νοῦς also manifests itself in practical or political life (βίος πολιτικός). He examines whether this second level of human activity is connected to the divine excellence of Aristotle’s teleology and thus to eudaimonia, the highest human goal, while also examining the presence of the νοῦς as an Aristotelian analogue of the self and as an expression of divinity in human affairs and in practical life. This chapter highlights the indissoluble relationship between the concept of selfhood and the concept of eudaimonia in Aristotelian thought, or as Long puts it, “Aristotle’s appraisal of nous is the most promising approach to crediting him with a more or less unitary and consistent conception of happiness.”<sup>54</sup> The thinking element in both contemplative and political life, as revealed in φρόνησις, practical wisdom, is to be regarded as the human self *par excellence*. By revisiting the last book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Long succeeds in raising anew the questions of the interrelation between contemplation, divinity, and happiness, and of the nature of the two types of Aristotelian life.

In Chapter 12, Long examines in a lucid way the essence of friendship in Stoicism and the character of perfect Stoic friends understood as second selves, *alter egos*, and compares the Stoic conception of friendship with the Aristotelian one, taking into account also the Platonic and Epicurean conceptions. Stoic friendship by excluding utility and by presupposing excellence,

was designed to characterize the features of an ideal partnership between persons, nor as a description of actual

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 191-192.

experience, but to serve as a model for what friendships would be like if friends truly possessed wisdom.<sup>55</sup>

Long argues that the major difference between Aristotle and the Stoics, which leads the Stoics to limit true friendship to relationships between morally excellent individuals, is based on their different conception of goodness and thus of virtue: The Stoics, unlike Aristotle, have a “monolithic”<sup>56</sup> theory of goodness that compels them to apply friendship, like happiness, only to virtuous persons, since “you must be completely knowledgeable about authentic values in order to love truly.”<sup>57</sup> However, if Stoic wisdom in its strict sense is absolutely essential to friendship, then Stoic friendship seems much more impersonal than Aristotelian friendship. This makes Stoic friendship “disturbingly remote from our experience in the little interest that it explicitly takes in a friend’s personality and uniqueness.”<sup>58</sup>

Chapter 13 focuses on Marcus Aurelius, already discussed in Chapter 1, and his theory of selfhood as expressed in his reflections on human identity. Marcus’ main concern is the *ἡγεμονικόν*, the ruling faculty of the Stoic soul, which is identified with the self as such. This self, which is actually man’s capacity for rational reflection, is understood by Marcus as an inner divinity. Long once again examines both selfhood and divinity in parallel, and in this case outlines the core of Stoic pantheism. In considering the question of autonomy in Marcus’ work, Long also emphasizes that Marcus’ distinction between embodied mentality and inner divinity anticipates Kant’s *noumenal* and *phenomenal* selves, demonstrating the timeless value of Marcus’ *Meditations* and their importance in the history of ideas.

In the final chapter, Long discusses Plotinus’ main argument regarding eudaimonia, namely that true happiness is only possible under the condition of a dualism in the self: an embodied soul, and an eternal, incorporeal intellect. Long argues that Plotinus “has synthesized Aristotle’s intellectual excellence, Stoic indifference concerning body and externals, and his own concept of the higher self’s purely noetic activity,”<sup>59</sup> to redefine both selfhood and eudaimonia. This chapter examines in depth a number of carefully selected arguments by Plotinus

---

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 200-201.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 233.

that get to the heart of the relationship between rationality and selfhood. Given the synthesis Plotinus draws from his entire earlier tradition, this final chapter is illuminating and recapitulatory of the entire book.

### III. Postscript

A few years ago, I had the invaluable opportunity to meet Anthony A. Long and discuss with him on Greek antiquity.<sup>60</sup> Rereading this interview today, after the enlightening journey of *Selfhood and Rationality*, I feel I know the author much better: I better understand his scholarly concerns and motives, or the direction of his thought. In *Selfhood and Rationality in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, a sequel to *Greek Models of Mind and Self*, the reader is given the privilege to peer into the laboratory of A. A. Long's scholarly life, in which he spent many years traveling the highways and byways of ancient Greek thought. This book gives the reader the opportunity to become acquainted with the author's hitherto unfinished project, the fruit of his personal, extended, and productive scholarly adventure in the vast Greek world.

### References

Annas, Julia. *The Morality of Happiness*. New York, and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Cornford, Francis MacDonald. *Plato and Parmenides*. London: Routledge, 2010.

Diels, Hermann, and Walther Kranz. *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. Zürich: Weidmann, 2004.

Long, Anthony A. *Greek Models of Mind and Self*. Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2015.

Long, Anthony A., and Despina Vertzagia. "Antiquity Revisited: A Discussion with Anthony Arthur Long." *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2020): 111-122.

Long, Antony A. *Selfhood and Rationality in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Heraclitus to Plotinus*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022.

McPherran, Mark. *The Religion of Socrates*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996.

---

<sup>60</sup> See Anthony A. Long, and Despina Vertzagia, "Antiquity Revisited: A Discussion with Anthony Arthur Long," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2020): 111-122.

Nagel, Thomas. *The View from Nowhere*. Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Plato. *Theaetetus. Sophist*. Translated by Harold North Fowler. Loeb Classical Library 123. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921.

Vlastos, Gregory. *Ironist and Moral Philosopher*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991.



