

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

people in a time of calamity and war, and that they fit in with hardly an exception, like the Psalms of the "sons of Korah," with the period of the Assyrian invasions.

E. H. PLUMPTRE.

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE HISTORY OF
Ἀπόλλυμι.

It is one of the palmary arguments of those who advocate the doctrine of "Conditional Immortality," that *ἀπόλλυμι* and its correlates, verbal and substantival, when applied to human beings, "bear, in Greek *prose*, only one signification—that which is self-evident;"¹ and this signification is further defined to be "in Plato, and all other known classical writers, *literal destruction* or *abolition of life*." It is admitted, of course, in passing that *ἀπόλλυμι* has the "secondary idiomatic sense of *to lose*;" and that "there are examples in the tragedians, in the 'hyperbole of passion and poetry,' in which the idea of *misery* and *pain* might seem to be more prominent than the *destruction* they were bringing on; but these are exceedingly rare, and in no cases occur, so far as [Mr. White] can ascertain, except when the misery is likely to *end* in destruction." Moreover, it is unreasonable, we are told, to urge "'figurative' senses on the strength of quotations supposed to contain similar figures, *taken from the Greek poets*;" for "in a grave *philosophical* or *religious* treatise these ['strong'] words must be taken in their proper and obvious meaning." Were it otherwise, we are reminded, "the Greek world" would have had "*to learn a new Greek language before it could understand the apostles*."

¹ For this and the succeeding quotations, see Mr. E. White's *Life in Christ* (3rd edition), pp. 403, 366, 367, 365. The italics are Mr. White's.

I cannot but suppose that those who wish to clench this argument would gladly include in their category of Greek prose the Greek prose of the age of the Septuagint and of the New Testament; indeed, if this were excluded, their argument would be somewhat significantly deficient. Now I have had occasion of late to look once more, here and there, into a few of the prose writers of the period I have mentioned, and, among these, into Polybius, a writer of history, born in the century in which the Septuagint version was made; into Philo, the Jewish philosopher and exegete, a contemporary of our Lord; and more especially into Plutarch, a writer of most passable Greek prose and of "grave philosophical and religious" (or, at any rate, moral) "treatises," in the second half of the first century; and perhaps the readers of the EXPOSITOR may find some interest in judging for themselves of the sense of ἀπόλλυμι and the like, in a few passages which have fallen across my path. To turn this casual "dipping" into a complete investigation, would call for liberal leisure, or else for *Indices Verborum*—those kindly short-cuts with which, in this particular instance, German industry and devotion have not yet, so far as I know, come to our rescue.

I understand Mr. White's position to be—that the moral sense of ἀπόλλυμι, whether altogether excluding or altogether overshadowing the connotation of the *literal abolition of life*, cannot be found in Greek prose. Let us first see whether it can be found in the plain historical prose of Polybius.

In Book xxxii. chap. 19, he is telling how it came about that war was declared in 597 A.U.C. by the Romans against the Dalmatians; and, among other causes he mentions that the senate was anxious to stir up afresh the military spirit among the Italians. "They did not wish the people in Italy," says he, "κατ' οὐδένα τρόπον ἀπόλλυσθαι διὰ τὴν πολυχρόνιον εἰρήνην, i.e. to become in any way demoral-

ized, ruined in *morale*, by reason of the long peace.¹ For it was then twelve years since the war with Perseus and the campaign in Macedonia." It can hardly be contended by any one that "non-existence," either immediate or remote, is here intended to be expressed by ἀπόλλυσθαι. Schweighäuser translates it by *otio corrupti*, and the Dübner edition by *longa pace torpere*; and the idea conveyed is, degeneracy in those qualities which, according to the Roman estimate, "made the man."

Plutarch, in his life of the Greek patriot Aratus (chap. 51), uses another "strong word" of this same family, *viz.* ἐξώλης, when speaking of Philip V. of Macedon, without any apparent reference to his end. He is describing the change that had come over the relations between Aratus and the king, and likewise over the character of the king himself. "For," says he, "Philip seems to have most extraordinarily and unexpectedly changed from a gentle king and a self-controlled youth, to a licentious man and an abandoned tyrant (ἀνὴρ ἀσελγῆς καὶ τύραννος ἐξώλης)." This word, which is own brother to ἀπολωλώς, had been already used to the same purpose in the familiar Greek of Aristophanes and in the forensic vocabulary of Demosthenes; who, in his speech against Theocrines (§ 82), affirms that there is "no race of men more abandoned (*i.e., morally unmanned*) than the race of informers." And here I may be allowed to illustrate the kinship of ἐξώλης and ἀπολωλώς by a quotation from a writer of elegant and refined Greek prose in the first century,—I mean Dion "the golden-mouthed," one of the most eminent of Greek rhetoricians and moralists. He is treating (xxx. 348 c) of divers iniquities, and, among them, one which "must be," he says, "pre-eminently abominable, considering that it is not committed even among them that are *utterly abandoned* (τοῖς

¹ Compare Falstaff's description of his ragamuffin company: "The cankers of a calm world and a long peace."

ἰσχάτως ἀπολωλόσι),” i.e., “past all *moral* recovery.” I should not care to be one of those who would maintain that Dion was here thinking of the future non-existence of the ἰσχάτως ἀπολωλότες. Wytttenbach translates the words by *vitiis corrupti*, and explains them by *διεφθαρμένοι*, another of the “strong expressions” for destruction. The wretches here spoken of are Cicero’s *omnium hominum perditissimi*, and nothing more, just as ἐσχάτως ἐξώλεις would have been. The sense is surely metaphorical and moral only; a hastened or aggravated abolition of life is left out of account.

Plutarch again uses the word ἀπόλλυμι in the treatise “On the Love of Riches” (chap. vii.). Pointing out the perniciousness of the training imparted by misers to their children, he says: “The children they think to educate they ruin and pervert (ἀπολλύουσι καὶ¹ προσδιαστρέφουσι), implanting in them their own miserliness and meanness, just as if they were building in their heirs a castle to guard the inheritance. For this is their teaching and exhortation: ‘Get gain and be thrifty, and measure your worth by your purse.’ Now this is not to educate, but to abase (or, perhaps, *draw together* ²), and sew up, as you would a purse, that it may hold and keep safe what is put into it. But while the purse becomes foul and fetid after the money has been put into it, the children of misers, even before they inherit the wealth, are filled with their fathers’ covetousness.” To make ἀπόλλυμι here include the idea of literal abolition of life, appears to me to be the introduction of a harsh and inharmonious element.

¹ Plutarch has a great fancy for compounds with πρὸς. (Compare the passage subsequently quoted from his *Life of Antony*.) Perhaps this πρὸς is like the American “to that,” and our “too”: e.g. “I won a case, and a big case to that,” *δικὴν εἶλον, καὶ μεγάλην γε πρὸς*. The πρὸς in *προσδιαστρέφουσι* seems to suggest, therefore, that the *διαστρέφουσι* is here even stronger than the *ἀπολλύουσι*—possibly a clearer and more vigorous definition of it.

² i.e. if *συστέλλειν* and *ἀπορράπτειν* are both used of the purse. But *συστέλλειν* may also signify “to contract,” “lower” the character.

Moral ruin from a cause diametrically opposite is likewise expressed by the same verb, where Plutarch is illustrating his discussion "On the Avoidance of Debt," by a story of the high-minded Philoxenus, the renowned dithyrambic poet of Cythera. At one time (as we know from other sources) Philoxenus took up his abode at the court of Dionysius, the tyrant of Syracuse; but soon after, for his attacks upon its luxury or for some other reason, he was cast into prison. His subsequent release and restoration to favour did not induce him to remain in that deteriorating atmosphere. So afraid was he of being demoralized by the profuseness around him, that not only did he quit the tyrant's court, but, according to Plutarch's story, gave up a large and valuable estate, and left the island. "'By heaven,' said he, as he looked upon the luxury and effeminacy and barbarity" (*ἀμουσία*—Mr. Matthew Arnold's "barbarity") "so much in fashion, 'By heaven, these good things (of mine) shall not ruin me (*ἀπολεῖ*), but I them.'" The meaning of *ἀπολεῖ* here needs no further elucidation.

In the next quotation the sense of *ἀπόλλυμι* is more unmistakably mixed, but I think the passage is worth adducing.

In the Life of Marcus Antonius (chap. 66), Plutarch is describing the Triumvir's utter demoralization, as exhibited especially when Cleopatra, with her fleet, suddenly retreated from the battle of Actium. He tells us how, there and then, Antony showed himself bereft of the spirit of a commander, and even of a man; nay, how he seemed incapable even of thinking for himself, but, "as some one jokingly said, lived as the soul in the body of her he loved; dragged along by Cleopatra just as if he had grown to her, and was carried about with her from place to place." "For no sooner did he see her ship making off, than, forgetting all else and abandoning and deserting those who were fighting and dying in his cause, he changed his own ship for

a quinquireme, and, with only two attendants, went in pursuit of the woman that had already ruined him and would ruin him yet more (τὴν ἀπολωλεκυῖαν ἤδη καὶ προσ-απολοῦσαν αὐτόν).” Antony’s ruin had already been accomplished, so the text informs us, though there was more to come. Cleopatra had led him to the bad all round: she had spoiled his character and ruined his prospects, and she would yet leave him a wreck of himself at the last. But I cannot help feeling that literal abolition of life is hardly in the writer’s thoughts at all.

Philo, I know, is dangerous ground, because of his tendency to allegory, and his Neo-Platonism. But Philo, though often fanciful, is often acute and ingenious; his treatises are “grave, philosophical, religious”; he was a Jew, and probably a Pharisee; and to a profound knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures he added an equally profound knowledge of the language and literature of Greece. St. Paul likewise was a Pharisee, and the two writers furnish some striking parallelisms alike in method and in expression, and in all probability it was in the Jewish schools of Alexandria that Apollos (perhaps the editor of the Epistle to the Hebrews) was trained to be “learned and mighty in the Scriptures.” From this Philo I shall be content to quote one passage, and leave it to speak for itself. In his treatise “On the Allegories of the Sacred Laws” (Book i., chap. 33), he is commenting on the passage in the Septuagint, Genesis ii. 17, “In the day in which ye eat thereof, ye shall die the death (θανάτῳ ἀποθανεῖσθε)”; and he deals with it as follows: “And yet, though they have eaten of it, they not only do not die, but they even beget children, and become the cause of life to others. What, then, are we to say? That death is of two kinds, the one being the death of the man, the other the peculiar death of the soul. The death of the man is the parting of soul from body; but the death of the soul is the destruction of virtue, and the

admission of vice. Accordingly, God says not merely 'die (*ἀποθανεῖν*),' but 'die the death (*θανάτῳ ἀποθανεῖν*)'; pointing out not the common death, but the peculiar and special death which is the death of the soul, buried in passions and all kinds of vice. And we may almost say that the latter death is opposed to the former. For the former is the separation of what had before been combined, to wit, body and soul; but the latter, on the contrary, is the conjunction of both, under these conditions, that dominion lies with the inferior, the body, and subjection with the superior, the soul. And when God says, 'die the death,' observe that He is dealing with the death inflicted as a punishment, not with that which comes by nature. Natural death is that whereby the soul is parted from the body; but the death inflicted as a punishment is when the soul dies¹ the life of virtue (*τὸν ἀρετῆς βίον θνήσκει*), and lives only the life of vice. Well does Heracleitus also speak on this topic, agreeing with the doctrine of Moses: 'We are¹ living the death of those men (*ζῶμεν τὸν ἐκείνων θάνατον*), and we have¹ died their life (*τεθνήκαμεν δὲ τὸν ἐκείνων βίον*).'" This passage is not quoted in order to recommend Philo's psychology; but it may suggest to some minds the possibility that the idea of moral death, as distinguished altogether from literal abolition of life, was one not entirely unfamiliar to the "Greek prose" world in the time of Christ.

In conclusion, I need hardly call attention to the fact that this paper is not intended as an attack upon the doctrine of "Conditional Immortality," but rather as a demurrer to the "vigour and rigour" of the philology on which it is founded.

JOHN MASSIE.

¹ The English has here been purposely sacrificed with the view of preserving the Greek paradoxical parallels to our idioms, "live a life," "die a death."