THE AREOPAGUS AS ECHO CHAMBER:
MIMESIS AND INTERTEXTUALITY IN ACTS 17

David M. Reis
Wells College

“Although you are not yet a Socrates, you should live
as someone who at least wants to be a Socrates.”
—Epictetus Ench. 51.3

The book of Acts has a flair for the dramatic: its pages are
filled with fantastic stories such as the appearance of the
resurrected Jesus and the descent of the Holy Spirit, the
apostles’ ability to perform miracles and magic, and a relentless
missionary zeal that leads to imprisonments, trials, and martyr-
doms. Out of all of these spectacular events, however, it is Paul’s
visit to Athens and his Areopagus speech (Acts 17:16-34), a
rather mundane event by Luke’s standards, that has captured
much of the scholarly attention.1 The interest in this episode has
centered on questions such as the speech’s historical accuracy,
its theological background, and its relationship to Paul’s own
letters. These discussions have been advanced by a variety of
methodological tools,2 but despite this diversity all of these

1 Fred Veltman, “The Defense Speeches of Paul in Acts,” in Perspectives on
Bruce, Commentary on the Book of Acts (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans
Socio-Rhetorical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing

Setting of Hellenistic History (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1989); David Gill, “Dionysios
and Damaris: A Note on Acts 17:34,” Catholic Biblical Quarterly 61 (1999): 483-
490; literary criticism: Hans Conzelmann, “The Address of Paul on the
(Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), 217-230; Dean Zweck, “The Exordium of the
Karl Olav Sandnes, “Paul and Socrates: The Aim of Paul's Areopagus Speech,”
Either/Or but Both/And in Paul's Areopagus Speech,” Biblical Interpretation 3
17,” in Society of Biblical Literature 1996 Seminar Papers (Atlanta: Scholars Press,
1996), 343-351; history of religions: Martin Dibelius, “Paul on the Areopagus,” in
studies point in the same direction, namely, to understand and contextualize Luke (or Paul) within early Christianity.

What has gone unnoticed, however, is the idea that the influence of the Areopagus speech may be multidirectional, that it may say something not only about Luke or Paul but about Socrates as well. This paper will pursue this line of thought by drawing on the insights of mimesis and intertextuality, two models that explore how the relationship between texts produces “tones” that resonate in new and often unexpected ways. These theories will provide the foundation for showing how the Areopagus speech acts as an echo chamber in which the tones of the text reverberate in two directions. While Luke gives his readers the opportunity to imagine Paul as Socrates, he also invites later readers to “re-hear” Socrates as Paul. Justin Martyr accepts this invitation by using the Areopagus speech to detail Socrates’ trial and death and to identify him as a Christian philosopher and martyr.

Mimesis and Intertextuality
(Let the Reader Understand)

Mimesis and intertextuality are especially well-equipped to uncover the polyphonic qualities of the Areopagus speech because they both begin with the observation that texts are not isolated literary units but complex productions that exist in relation to other texts. Through these relationships texts do not retain a uniform meaning but are constantly resignified by readers who approach the material from new perspectives. It is this dynamic process of re-hearing how texts relate to one another that mimesis and intertextuality seek to decode.

Mimesis

Recent studies on mimesis have shown that, in its most advanced forms, imitative literature did not slavishly reproduce copies of earlier works but rather interacted with these sources in complex and creative ways. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, for instance, refers to this type of mimesis as occurring as "a natural result of being for a long time in close contact with the model and living with it." This sentiment is echoed by Seneca, who describes the mimetic task as an "absorption" and "digestion" of various models that lead to a new synthesis. Longinus extends these organic metaphors by comparing the practice of imitation to prophetic inspiration. For these and other ancient rhetoricians, then, imitation was a subtle art in which a writer internalized and transformed his models so that they spoke to a new situation.

These insights, which attest to the flexibility of mimesis, are particularly helpful when analyzing the imitative traditions surrounding Socrates. While he was alive Socrates had already attracted numerous imitators who sought to emulate everything from his dress and style to his dialectical skill and dedication to knowledge. After his death, the fascination and reverence for Socrates inspired the systematic production of literary works based upon his teachings. These writings, which Aristotle coined "Socratic dialogues" (Σωκρατικοί λόγοι) and classified with other mimetic works, were produced by his closest associates as a way to disseminate their teacher's ideas. Each author naturally had a

---


5 Sen. Ep. 84.4-9
7 Quintillian (10.5.5) argues that the imitation should not "restrict itself to the bare interpretation of the original: its duty is rather to rival and vie with the original in the expression of the same thoughts."
8 Ar. Birds 1280-1283; Pl. Apol. 23c; Xen. Mem. 1.2.2-3.
different interpretation of these ideas, so that the dialogues may say less about the “historical” Socrates and more about the spirited and contentious rivalry that existed among students who sought to stake a claim as the true transmitter of their master’s teachings. In this literary agon, the dialogues of Plato and Xenophon eventually managed to surpass the others in importance, so that by the late Hellenistic period they were routinely identified as exemplary models for aspiring authors to imitate. Moreover, just as the earliest followers of Socrates vied with one another through their writing, so too did later philosophical schools draw on these authors’ Sokratikoi Logoi as they jostled with one another in an attempt to claim the Socratic heritage as their own.

Hellenistic philosophers who sought to prove their faithfulness to Socrates were thus engaged in a mimetic task that attempted to appropriate both his teachings and argumentative style. Because later writers credited Socrates with shifting philosophy from speculation on the cosmos to inquiries into human behavior, his ethical ideas are cited most often. Yet the Stoics, for whom cosmology was a central concern, identified passages from Xenophon’s Memorabilia that “proved” Socrates’ ethical views were dependent on his belief that a providential God created, ordered, and maintained the world.

9 See Paul A. Vander Waerdt, “Introduction,” in The Socratic Movement, ed. idem (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 11; Diskin Clay, “The Origins of the Socratic Dialogue,” in The Socratic Movement, ed. Paul A. Vander Waerdt (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 26-33. Aristotle (Poet. 1147b) classifies the “Socratic dialogues” as mimetic works: “There is another art which imitates by means of language alone, and that either in prose or verse—which verse, again, may either combine different metres or consist of but one kind—but this has hitherto been without a name. For there is no common term we could apply to the mimes of Sophron and Xenarchus and the Socratic dialogues on the one hand; and, on the other, to poetic imitations in iambic, elegiac, or any similar metre.”


11 Both Dionysius of Halicarnassus (On Imitation 9.4.2) and Quintillian (10.1.81-82) rank Plato and Xenophon first among the philosophers worthy of imitation.


13 Epictetus, for instance, applies the Socratic dictum that the unexamined life is not worth living to his discussion of the Stoic category of “assent” (συγκαταθέντα) (Diss. 3.12.14-15; cf. Pl. Apol. 38a).

14 Xen. Mem. 1.4.2-18; 4.3.2-18; 4.4.1-25. On the Stoic appropriation of Xenophon’s work, see Long, “Socrates,” 162-164; Joseph DeFilippo and Phillip T.
this exercise of mining the dialogues in order to show a consis-
tency with Socratic ideals was the practice of imitating his style,
in particular his use of elenctic and protreptic discourse. For
Socrates, cross-examination and exhortation were essential for
uncovering sloppy thinking and encouraging a new way of
thinking. In a similar manner, these styles become the twin
pillars of Epictetus’ philosophical agenda: “The person who can
show an individual the conflict responsible for his error and
clearly make him see how he is not doing what he wants to do
and is doing what he does not want to do—that is the person who
combines expertise in argument, exhortation and refutation”
(προτρεπτικός καὶ ἐλεγκτικός).\(^{15}\)

**Intertextuality**

At the heart of this mimetic enterprise was the desire to align
one’s thought with the Socratic tradition in order to gain credi-
bility and attract potential adherents. In this process of imitating
Socrates’ teachings and style, these later philosophers would, in
effect, become “Socratized.” At the same time, however, their
appropriation of his message effectively transformed Socrates into
a “Hellenized” philosopher.\(^ {16}\) Studies that seek to examine how

---

15 Diss. 2.26.4; cf. Diss. 3.23.34-37. On Epictetus’ imitation of Socratic style,
Press, 2002), 52-57. For Epictetus’ use of Socratic sources, see Klaus Döring,
“Sokrates bei Epiktet,” in *Studia Platonica: Festschrift für Herman Gundert*,

16 An analysis of a passage from Epictetus on the nature of the true Cynic
serves as an example of this interplay between the Socratic and Stoic traditions.
In Diss. 3.22.26, Epictetus exclaims: “O people, where are you bound for? O
miserable ones, what are you doing? You reel up and down, like the blind. You
have left the real path and are going off into another one. You are looking for
serenity and happiness in the wrong place, where it does not exist, and you do not
believe when someone shows you. Why do you seek it in externals (ἐξω)? It does
not exist in the body.” This passage echoes Pl. *Cleit.* 407a-b: “O people, where are you bound for? You act in ignorance of everything you should know, giving all
your attention to securing wealth, and as far as your sons, your heirs, are
concerned, you fail to find moral tutors so that they may learn how to use it
justly.”
this reciprocity functions often turn to intertextual theory for support.\textsuperscript{17} Minimally, this theory begins with the assumption all texts interact with a larger web or network of other texts, so that no text may be viewed as an isolated or independent construction.\textsuperscript{18} Every text is thus a “mosaic of quotations” in which no author creates anything that is entirely original.\textsuperscript{19} Moreover, intertextuality asserts that when a text draws upon another text (the “already said”) the influence is not channeled in only one direction. On the contrary, the current travels in both directions, causing a resignification of both. If texts are fundamentally relational, then it becomes impossible to speak of a fixed or stable meaning for any text. The “echo” metaphor is often used to

The relationship between these two texts reveals that Epictetus has elaborated and transformed the meaning of the Platonic passage. While Socrates criticizes his contemporaries for their excessive interest in gaining wealth and their failure to educate their children to manage their possessions with justice, Epictetus alters this meaning so that the speech becomes a meditation on the futility of finding happiness in all “externals” and a call to focus on the cultivation of the true self. In this interaction, Epictetus becomes “Socratized” to the extent that he echoes Socrates’ words, but Socrates’ position as a voice for Epictetus means that he has become “Stoicized.”


\textsuperscript{18} Daniel Boyarin, \textit{Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash} (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1990), 14: “every text is constrained by the literary system of which it is a part and that every text is ultimately dialogical in that it cannot but record the traces of its contentions and doubling of earlier discourses.”

illustrate this instability. At its most basic level, the literary echo denotes the re-production of a previous concept or thought in another text. Studying how this echo operates in its context can reveal how the author understood and transformed an earlier idea. Yet the tones of the echo can lead the reader to re-hear the source, to absorb and transform its meaning.\(^{20}\) The resulting collision generates “sound waves” that create opportunities to discern how the echo might cause a mutual re-signification of both texts: the older literature “continues to speak in and through later texts that both depend on and transform the earlier.”\(^ {21}\)

Echoes do more, however, than simply point the reader to a specific source text. They can also open up larger fields of interplay between texts, acting like signs that trigger any number of associations between a text and its model(s). As Richard Hays has argued, “When a literary echo links the text in which it occurs to an earlier text, the figurative effect of the echo can lie in the unstated or suppressed (transumed) points of resonance between the two texts.”\(^ {22}\) This feature, which Hays calls metalepsis, points to the malleable nature of texts: the echo can evoke connections beyond the immediate literary link, and in so doing, it “places the reader within a field of whispered or unstated correspondences.”\(^ {23}\) The echo may thus point beyond the immediate literary source and allow the reader to enter into a wider field of texts that provide myriad opportunities for further interpretation.

\(^{20}\) Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 66.

\(^{21}\) Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 14. An illustration of this process in Revelation has been detailed by Steve Moyise, “Intertextuality and the Study of the Old Testament in the New Testament,” in *The Old Testament in the New Testament: Essays in Honour of J.L. North*, ed. idem (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 26-32. Moyise, shows, on the one hand, that when John uses the lion to make a statement about messianic power (5:5-6), he is drawing on Genesis 49:9 and the traditional Jewish exegetical move to associate this figure with the messiah. On the other hand, his identification of the conqueror as a lamb forces these earlier formulations of messianic power to be re-considered. Thus, while John allows the reader to think of Jesus as a lion, the victorious actions of the lamb necessitate a revaluation of this traditional understanding, so that whenever the word “lion” appears one should think “lamb.” Consequently, the author “wishes to encourage mutual interpretation. The images of power inform our understanding of the Lamb and the image of the ‘Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered’ provides a new context for the Old Testament messianic texts” (30).


This idea presents the interpreter with an immediate difficulty: if intertextuality resists closed or univocal readings, the variety of connections between texts is boundless—everything from the “general text” of culture is theoretically “in play.” The interpretive task of the reader, however, is to make sense of this “indeterminate surplus of meaningful possibilities,” to draw boundaries that make interpretation possible. The image of the “echo-chamber” establishes just such boundaries, for echoes need parameters or “walls” in order to be heard. By identifying echoes, the interpreter can therefore establish a perimeter to view the dialogic action between texts. Because of the numerous Socratic echoes in Acts 17, the following analysis will draw Socratic boundaries around the text. In order to make a convincing case for this reading, it will be important to show 1) that Socratic echoes exist, 2) that Luke could have been aware of sources behind the echoes and have intended them as such, 3) that they cohere with the larger argument of the text, and 4) that other interpreters have heard the same echoes.

Acts 17: Paul in the Image of Socrates

Studies on mimesis and intertextuality in the New Testament, and Luke in particular, have focused almost exclusively on how the Christian authors echo Old Testa-

---


27 Hays (Echoes of Scripture, 29-32) constructs a list of seven criteria for identifying echoes: availability (was the source available to the reader?), volume (what is the level of literary correspondence?), recurrence (is the echo found elsewhere?), thematic coherence (how well does the echo fit into the overall argument?), historical plausibility (could the author have intended the echo?), history of interpretation (have other readers heard the same echo?), and satisfaction (does the proposed reading make sense?). For a similar list, see also Dennis Ronald MacDonald, Christianizing Homer: The Odyssey, Plato, and the Acts of Andrew (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 302-316. For a critique of Hays’s arguments, see Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, eds., Paul and the Scriptures of Israel (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 42-96.
ment ideas or patterns. The echo chambers established in these instances are thus determined to a great extent by the New Testament’s repeated allusions to Jewish literature. Yet there is good reason to suspect that the writers of the New Testament did not operate exclusively, or even primarily, within such narrow parameters established by the Jewish scriptures. That texts outside of the confines of the Judeo-Christian tradition may have served as models for imitation and as intertexts is especially intriguing in the case of Luke, who appears to have mastered the fundamental aspects of Greco-Roman rhetoric and who likely wrote for a primarily Hellenistic audience. It is therefore important to widen the boundaries of the echo chamber to determine if any tones inspired by texts other than the Old Testament can be heard. Acts 17 serves as a test case for this examination, for in this chapter Paul enters Athens, the cultural and intellectual center of the Greco-Roman world, and engages in a debate with representatives of the Hellenistic philosophical tradition.

The prologue to this story contains numerous references that suggest that Luke was interested in constructing an idealized portrait of the city of Athens and its intellectual traditions from the classical period. The description of the city as “full of idols”

---


31 Conzelmann (“Address of Paul,” 217-218) has observed that such classical portraits of Greek culture are characteristic of Luke.
and its citizens as religiously zealous and incessantly curious were all commonplaces that stem from classical authors. Luke’s reference to Stoic and Epicurean philosophers also introduces the reader to the city’s philosophical heritage, a connection that is made more forcefully through a number of echoes that link Paul with the figure of Socrates. Like his fifth-century counterpart, Paul “argued” (διελέγετο) “in the marketplace” (ἐν τῷ ἀγοραῖ) and was thought to be “a proclaimer of foreign divinities” (Ἢνων δαίμονῶν ... καταγγελεύος) who was “introducing strange things” (ἐνιζοντα ... εἰσφέρεις) to the Athenian populace. Luke further underscores the link between Paul and Socrates by beginning Paul’s speech with the phrase “men of Athens” (ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι), the same utterance that Socrates employs in his opening address to the Athenian jury and no less than thirty-four times thereafter.

The popularity and prominence that Socrates and Athens held in the consciousness of antiquity make it difficult to think that Luke’s audience would not have detected the volume and density of these echoes. Before Paul even begins to speak, then, Luke has begun to mold him into a Socratic philosopher: he is a skilled dialectician whose novel ideas lead to disputes in the public arena. When Paul addresses the Athenians, however, he shifts from an argumentative to a hortatory style. Instead of cross-examining his audience, Paul criticizes their idolatrous practices and boldly "proclaims" (καταγγέλλω) the reality of the

---

32 Regarding the classical references in the prologue, Haenchen (Acts of the Apostles, 527) states that "The narrative framework is composed of a number of motifs which at that time every half-educated person recognized as specifically Athenian." For pagan references to these motifs, see Conzelmann, Acts of the Apostles, 138-140.


34 Acts 17:22; Pl. Apol. 17a.

35 Haenchen (Acts of the Apostles, 527) concludes that “every half-educated person” would have recognized these allusions as specifically Athenian.
unknown God, who “commands” (παραγγέλλει) all people “to repent” (μετανοεῖν). Luke, like Epictetus, has thus woven together the two primary features of Socratic discourse, elenctic and protreptic. With his initial allusion to Paul’s dialectical argumentation framing the rest of the episode, Luke has Paul deliver a missionary speech in which he exhorts the crowd to turn away from its idolatrous practices in preparation for Jesus’ future judgment.

In addition to Luke’s use of Socratic echoes and his appropriation of Socrates’ style, the structure of Paul’s speech provides a further link to the Athenian philosopher. In the speech, Paul explicitly calls on the crowd to abandon its current beliefs and practices and reorient itself to a new way of living. According to the apostle, the true God is “unknown,” neither residing in shrines nor in idols. Furthermore, contrary to common opinion, he needs nothing from humans but has instead given them places to live as well as “life and breath and everything.” Although God is transcendent, he cares for humanity and remains near, so that it is appropriate to think of humans as his “offspring” (γενοῦς). Thus, Paul concludes, humans are responsible for maintaining this proper knowledge of God so that they might exhibit behavior that will allow them to be saved at the judgment.

With the exception of this final point, the content of Paul’s exhortation has parallels in the discourses of both Plato and Xenophon. For example, in Plato’s Apology Socrates makes it clear that his entire life has been devoted to encouraging his fellow citizens to abandon the desire for wealth and power and focus instead on acquiring “wisdom and truth and the perfection of the soul.” Furthermore, the Xenophontic Socrates makes it clear that a correct understanding of the nature of God and his action in the world is a prerequisite for attaining this virtue. In these passages, which the Stoics popularized and Clement of Alexandria quoted, Socrates argues that God is invisible, omniscient, and benevolent: although he himself is “unseen”

38 Acts 17:25.
40 Acts 17:30-31.
41 Pl. Apol. 29e: “φρονήσεως δὲ καὶ ἀλήθειας καὶ τῆς ψυχῆς.” See also Apol. 30a-b; 36c.
42 Clem. Alex. Protr. 6. See also n. 14.
(άόρατος) by humans, he nevertheless “sees all things and hears all things alike, and is present in all places and heedful of all things.” His care for the created world manifests itself in his special relationship with humans. This is proved first through his creation of the human body, into which he implanted the soul, which “more than all else that is human partakes of the divine [and] reigns manifestly within us.” It is also expressed, on a more general level, through his decision to legislate moral laws to guide human behavior. Because God has shown such care toward humanity, Socrates states that humans should honor him, for it is through these expressions of reverence that they will attain virtues such as “piety” (εὐσεβεστέρους), “prudence” (σοφρονεστέρους) and “justice” (δικαίοστέρους).

If the literary and structural parallels between Luke’s text and the Socratic literary tradition are accepted, then it becomes possible to view the former as a work of mimesis based upon the latter. Luke has, of course, approached his models in a creative way. For instance, when he reports that the Stoics and Epicureans “took” (ἐπιλαβώμενοι) Paul to the Areopagus, it is possible to imagine that the apostle had been placed under arrest and put on trial. Indeed, elsewhere in Acts the verb epilambano refers to formal arrests, while the Areopagus was well-known as an Athenian judicial council. Yet the legal overtones of these terms do not correspond well with Paul’s subsequent speech, which is usually classified as deliberative rather than forensic rhetoric. In addition, the Areopagus is itself an ambiguous term, and could refer to a physical location instead of the judicial body. While Luke shows an interest in casting Paul as Socrates, he does not feel compelled to follow the generic style that would fit the scene of a formal arrest and trial. On the contrary, he appears simply to evoke the image of trial and arrest, allowing it to resonate in the

43 Xen. Mem. 4.3.13; 1.4.18: “πάντα ὑράν καὶ πάντα ἁκοῦειν καὶ πανταχοῦ παρεῖναι καὶ ἀμα πάντων ἑπιμελεῖσθαι.”

44 Xen. Mem. 4.3.14: “ψυξί, ἢ ἐπερ τι καὶ ἄλλο τῶν ἁθροπίνων τοῦ θεοῦ μετέχει, ὅτι μὲν βασιλεῖ έν ἡμῖν φανερόν.”

45 Xen. Mem. 4.3.2-18; 4.4.1-25.

46 Xen. Mem. 1.4.19; 4.3.2, 18; 4.4.25.


48 For arguments against a forensic setting for the episode, see Conzelmann, “Address of Paul,” 219; Veltman, “Defense Speeches of Paul,” 243-256; Sandes, “Paul and Socrates,” 15.
reader’s mind without feeling the need to make the connection explicit.

The ambiguities presented by the quasi-legal terminology suggest that the Socratic echoes bear a metaleptic quality that places the reader within a matrix of “whispered and unstated correspondences.” Investigating these secondary traces expands the field of signification and explains how the Socratic Paul might resonate in the book of Acts as a whole.⁴⁹ In other words, if Acts 17 provides an impetus to substitute “Socrates” for “Paul,” then this formulation can affect the reader’s understanding of the apostle both after and before his experience in Athens. Following this line of thought, a number of parallels begin to emerge. For example, both Socrates and Paul experienced life-transforming events that brought them into intimate contact with the divine.⁵⁰ This supernatural force then directs and focuses their actions throughout the rest of their lives: Socrates speaks to anyone in his search for wisdom while Paul missionizes first to the Jews and then the Gentiles.⁵¹ Despite (or perhaps because of) this special status, both appear as a threat to the social order and consequently suffer for their loyalty.⁵² Even so, neither exhibits any fear for his life when confronted with arrest, imprisonment, trial, and, eventually, death.⁵³ Finally, Socrates’ hopeful optimism

---

⁴⁹ This track represents a departure from the traditional comparison of Paul and Jesus. For a bibliography on this thesis, see Dennis Ronald MacDonald, “Apocryphal and Canonical Narratives about Paul,” in Paul and the Legacies of Paul, ed. William S. Babcock (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1990), 64, n. 39.


⁵³ On fearlessness: Socrates: Pl. Apol. 28b-c; 29d; 32b-d; 34c; Xen. Apol. 22-23; Paul: Acts 9:16; 20:24. Although Paul does not die at the end of Acts, the text
regarding his fate after death is amplified by Paul’s bold proclamation of the resurrection, the cornerstone of his theology in Acts.  

Whether or not Luke intended for his readers to make all of these connections, an intertextual reading of the echoes in Acts 17 opens the text to new and creative interpretations. Of course, the number of correspondences detected is limited only by the reader’s own background: it might be possible, for instance, for a more literate reader to think of Paul’s conversion experience on the road to Damascus within the context of Socrates’ discussion of the philosopher’s movement from darkness to light in the “Allegory of the Cave.” However, what is more important is whether Socratic echoes exist in Luke’s story and whether Luke could have had access to the traditions in which they are embedded. From the foregoing it appears that both questions can be answered affirmatively. While the volume and density of the echoes suggest that the Socratic literary tradition acts as the intertext for Luke, it may not be necessary, however, to think that the evangelist had manuscripts of either Plato or Xenophon on hand. Rather, because the vocabulary used the episode would have been easily recognized as pertaining to Socrates, it is perhaps more likely that Luke, as ancient rhetoricians advised, had “internalized” or “absorbed” the discourses of his model; in other words, that he had simply “recalled” Socratic vocabulary from antiquity’s “general text.”

What, then, is to be gained by casting Paul in the shadow of Socrates? Considering Acts 17 alone, it would appear that the Areopagus speech should be placed alongside other late ancient philosophical writings that attempted to claim the Athenian as the mouthpiece for later philosophical and theological positions. In this case, Luke constructs a Socratic Paul who deftly negotiates among his enemies with rhetorical skill, first by developing an argument for the reality of the one true God based on common Hellenistic philosophical principles, and then by proclaiming repeatedly alludes to it, as MacDonald (“Apocryphal and Canonical Narratives,” 64–66) has argued.

54 Pl. Apol. 40a-42a; Paul: Acts 17:18, 32; 23:6; 24:15, 21.
55 Many intertextual studies have eliminated or de-emphasized the role of the author. See Allen, Intertextuality, 13-14, 24, 40.
56 Pl. Rep. 514a-518d.
57 This background has been explored most recently by Balch (“Areopagus Speech,” 52-79) and Neyrey (“Acts 17, Epicureans, and Theodicy,” 118-134).
the decidedly Christian teaching about the resurrection and judgment, which elicits among his audience consternation, intrigue, and conversion. From the perspective of Acts as a whole, thinking of Paul as a Socratic figure allows the reader to place the apostle within both the philosophical and martyrological currents of late antiquity. As the later church fathers show, establishing these areas of correspondence with the Greco-Roman world was crucial in their attempts to make Christianity intelligible to its larger audience. Early Christians who extolled Socrates as an exemplar of these currents could thus imagine that the Lukan Paul, who displays a philosophical sophistication and proclaims the *kerygma* despite his approaching death, was cut from the same cloth as his Athenian forerunner.

Acts 17 and Justin Martyr: Socrates in the Image of Paul

As Christianity began to face Roman persecution, many early writers appealed to Hellenistic philosophy as a way to explicate their faith. In the figure of Socrates they found an advantageous model, one whose intellectual insights and composure prior to death were worthy of imitation. Justin Martyr develops both of these themes in his treatment of Socrates, a figure who becomes a paradigm for his Christian audience. For instance, in his discussion of Christ as the Logos, Justin states that all of the philosophers who sought to “contemplate and investigate reality” prior to the incarnation of Christ were brought before tribunals (δικαστήρια) as impious persons and busybodies. And Socrates, who was more forcible in this direction than all of them, was accused of the very same crimes as ourselves. For they said that he was introducing new divinities (καινὰ δαίμονα εἴσοψε ρεῖν), and did not consider those to be gods whom the state recognized. But he cast out from the state both Homer and the rest of the poets, and taught people to reject wicked demons ... and he exhorted them to become acquainted with the God who was to them unknown, by means


of investigation of reason (πρὸς θεοῦ δὲ τοῦ ἄγνωστου αὐτῶς διὰ λόγου ζητήσεως ἐπίγνωσιν προϊτέρετο).\textsuperscript{60}

In this passage, Justin underscores Socrates’ intellectual superiority: although the Athenians considered him a nuisance for his religious critique, the philosopher encouraged them to “seek” after the “unknown God.” Not only does Luke relate the same things about Paul during his stay in Athens, but the shared vocabulary leaves little doubt that Justin’s text echoes Acts 17: Paul and Socrates introduce foreign or new divinities, criticize the gods of the city, and promote instead the reality of the transcendent, “unknown God.” Moreover, the reference to the “accusations” and “tribunal” that Socrates faced evokes Paul’s summons to the Areopagus.\textsuperscript{61}

In addition to lending credibility to the hypothesis that Luke’s audience could have heard the Socratic echoes in Acts 17,\textsuperscript{62} Justin’s presentation effectively Christianizes, or more accurately, “Paulinizes” Socrates. Placing Socrates within the framework of Christianity contributes to Justin’s larger goal of presenting Christianity as a philosophy that, because of its commitment to reason, is well equipped to confront its current persecutions with courage. The philosophical nature of Christianity is based

\textsuperscript{60} 2 Apol. 10.4-6.


\textsuperscript{62} On Justin’s background in Platonic philosophy, see Arthur J. Droge, “Justin Martyr and the Restoration of Philosophy,” Church History 56 (1987): 303-319; M.J. Edwards, “On the Platonic Schooling of Justin Martyr,” Journal of Theological Studies 42 (1991): 17-34; Charles Nahm, “The Debate on the ‘Platonism’ of Justin Martyr,” Second Century 9 (1992): 129-151. Edwards argues that “Platonism at this time was in the mouth of every wandering pedagogue, every sophist, every speculator of whatever professed allegiance” (21). The interest in philosophy at this popular level would suggest that it is unnecessary to think that only those with rigorous school training would have heard the Socratic echoes in Acts. Rather, anyone with a modicum of knowledge of Greco-Roman cultural traditions would likely have heard them as well.
primarily on Justin’s understanding of the *logos*. According to his teaching, prior to the incarnation of Jesus, the Logos was partially revealed in the world through those who lived in harmony with it. Among those living prior to Jesus, Justin ranks Socrates first because of his dedication to the exercise of reason and his insistence on speaking the truth even when confronted by hostile human or demonic forces. Justin claims for Christians the same unwavering dedication to reason: not only do they have divinely-implanted “rational powers” (*λογικων δυνατων*) that lead them to a reasoned understanding of God, but through the incarnation of the Logos they have been given teachings that seek to overturn current irrational beliefs and practices and restore the human race.

Although the *logos* has been present in all ages, Justin maintains that those who have possessed it have traditionally suffered persecution and death. Socrates’ case is a prime example, for when he “tried, by true reasoning and definite evidence (*λογιων ἀληθείας καὶ ἐξεταστικῶς*), to [enlighten humanity], and deliver people from the demons, then the demons themselves, by means of people who rejoiced in wickedness, compassed his death, as an atheist and an impious person, on the charge of introducing new divinities.” The fact that Christians, who possess an even fuller understanding of the Logos than Socrates, are subject to the same charges indicates for Justin that the demons who attacked Socrates are still at work persecuting those who live according to the Logos. Just as Christians have been accused of the same crimes as Socrates and have endured a similar fate, so too do they exhibit Socrates’ rational approach to death. Indeed, while he was studying Platonic philosophy, Justin recounts how he had marveled at Christians who were slandered but remained “fearless of death.”

---

63 For a full discussion of this issue, see Holte, “Logos Spermatikos,” 109-168.
64 1 Apol. 5.3-4; 46.3; 2 Apol. 3.6-7; 7.3-4; 13.1-6.
65 1 Apol. 10.4; 12.8-9; 21.5-6; 23.1-3.
66 Skarsaune, “Judaism and Hellenism,” 599.
67 1 Apol. 5.3.
68 1 Apol. 5.3: “in our case they [the demons] show a similar activity” (*καὶ ὡμοίως ἐφ᾿ ἡμῶν τὸ αὐτὸ ἑνήργησαν*). See also 2 Apol. 10.5; Athen. *Plea Regarding Christians* 31. In their discussion of Christian martyrdom, Droge and Tabor (Noble Death, 139) assert that “The analogy with Socrates is one that Christians themselves were quick to notice.”
69 2 Apol. 12.
observer of all," Justin imagines a Christian defense that continues to uncover and expose injustice while at the same time exhorting the wicked to "be converted [and to] become wise."\textsuperscript{70}

This philosophical approach to death can be found at the beginning of the \textit{First Apology}, as Justin insists that "no evil can be done to us, unless we are proved evildoers, or shown to be wicked." He then assures the emperor, in characteristically Socratic fashion: "You are able to kill us, but not to hurt us."\textsuperscript{71} As an example of the proper behavior toward enemies, Justin outlines his own response to the Cynic philosopher Crescens. Facing charges of impiety and atheism, Justin recalls that when he confronted his accuser about Christian beliefs he “questioned him and found most convincingly that he truly knows nothing.”\textsuperscript{72} From Crescens’ responses he is left to conclude that his opponent is not a philosopher but a lover of vainglory, for “a man must in no way be honored before the truth.”\textsuperscript{73} Like Socrates, Justin has used elenchus to uncover the ignorance of his opponent, proving once again that the best defense against one’s enemies is a good offense, and the best offense is that which is grounded in the \textit{logos}.\textsuperscript{74} It is through the manifestation of their reason, then, that Christians prove their superiority to the irrational forces that inhabit the world: like those who previously displayed the \textit{logos}, they have chosen the path of Virtue over Vice.\textsuperscript{75} Through death, then, the Christian martyr is a philosopher \textit{par excellence}, for martyrdom is "the mark of the truly rational worshipper of God."\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{70} 2 \textit{Apol.} 12.
\textsuperscript{71} 1 \textit{Apol.} 1-2; cf. Pl. \textit{Apol.} 30c-d.
\textsuperscript{72} 2 \textit{Apol.} 3.4: "Καὶ γὰρ προθείνατε με καὶ ἐρωτήσατε αὐτὸν ἐρωτήσεις τινὰς τοιαύτας καὶ μαθεῖν καὶ ἐλέγξαι ὅτι ἄληθος μηθὲν ἐπισταταί." 
\textsuperscript{73} 2 \textit{Apol.} 3.6; Pl. \textit{Rep.} 595c.
\textsuperscript{74} Fédu, "La figure de Socrate," 58-59: "le témoignage de Socrate—sa \textit{marturía}—annonçait prophétiquement le témoignage que des chrétiens comme Justin seraient conduits à rendre face à leurs propres accusateurs. Sans doute est-il d’ailleurs significatif que, sur les cinq passages des \textit{Apologies} qui font explicitement référence à Socrate, trois figurent dans ce qu’on appelle d’habitude la \textit{Seconde apologie}, c’est-à-dire dans ces quelques chapitres qui sont directement introduits par le rappel des récentes persécutions contre les chrétiens et qui font état des accusations proférées par le philosophe Crescens.”
\textsuperscript{75} 2 \textit{Apol.} 11; cf. Xen. \textit{Mem.} 2.1.21-34.
\textsuperscript{76} Skarsaune, "Judaism and Hellenism," 598. According to Justin (1 \textit{Apol.} 21.6), "only those are deified who have lived near to God in holiness and virtue" (ἀπαθιστικῶς ... μόνον ... τοὺς ὕστερος εἰναρέτως ἐγγίξας δὲ βιώντας).
Acts 17 thus reverberates in many directions. By incorporating Socratic echoes into this chapter, Luke gives his readers the opportunity to think that Paul’s activity in Athens paralleled that of the greatest philosopher from antiquity. The metaleptic function of these echoes also provides an impetus for re-hearing the entire career of the apostle within a Socratic context, albeit as a Christian missionary proclaiming resurrection and judgment. With this final proclamation, Luke stakes a claim to the Socratic tradition by intimating that his “Socratized” Paul has in effect “Paulinized” Socrates. This textual interplay therefore leads to a mutual resignification of both figures, a point that Justin clearly perceived. In his Second Apology, the Areopagus address serves to link Socrates to Christianity, and more specifically, to contribute to his development of a Christian identity based on philosophy and martyrdom. Although Tertullian would have been dismayed with this conclusion, for both Luke and Justin Athens does indeed have something to do with Jerusalem.

†

Socrates