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Clementine Sight: Exploring Vision in The Protrepticus

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Clementine Sight:

Exploring Vision in *The Protrepticus*

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

By

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Part 1: Looking at Heaven and Earth	10
Part 2: Problematic Vision: Sex and Icons	25
Conclusion	34
Bibliography	40

Note: Greek to English translations are my own except where otherwise noted.

Introduction

There are three major works that are attributed to Clement of Alexandria, a Christian preacher of the second century CE, whose life remains shrouded in no small amount of mystery. These writings are: *The Protrepticus*, or *Exhortation to the Greeks*, which as its title suggests, is a persuasive, hotly worded polemic to the Greek provinces in effort to sway them from idol worship, *The Pedagogue*, or *Instructor*, a handbook in Christian living and proper ethics, and a series of volumes called *The Stromateis*, or *Miscellanies*, comprised of fragmentary thoughts on philosophy and other subjects. It is the first of these works, *The Protrepticus*, that I wish to draw attention to in this paper, in order to explore a very particular topic: the phenomenon of human sight as it is revealed and critiqued by Clement.

My exploration will aim to understand how this Early Church Father's outcry against icons in *The Protrepticus* represents an approach to vision marked by a reconciliation of Greek and Jewish philosophy with an impending Christian mission advocates for a religious truth by mediating the use of individual sight. Clement engages in a dialogue of tradition and transition that places him among other pagan writers contemporary to his time. Their's is an interest in classical antiquity that is pervaded by a sense self-awareness within a trajectory of cross-cultural thought. Vision becomes a principle mode of negotiating space, imagery, and, for Clement, a new kind of spiritual knowledge and morality. But the Greek viewer's ability to *see* the wisdom that Clement advocates depends largely on his success in steering them away from corruption by the

trickery and seduction that images pose in popular culture. It is the viewing, and ultimately misunderstanding of icons, that threatens to hold pagans in a state of deception by worldly materialism and obscure the knowledge of the true God.

Clement acknowledges that the way to responsibly negotiate looking within the physical and heavenly realms is hinted at by both Hellenic and Judaic literature alike, and brings their ideas to fruition through his attack, revealing that there is meaning contained in the past to elucidate his outline of ethical Christian looking. In effect he presents his own “Clementine” theory of viewing, one whose treatment of the religious and physical experiences that comprise the faculty of sight, bypass any treachery of imitative pictures and harmonize God and nature, ideas synonymous with the only truly beautiful image. The result is a quasi-divine vision endowed by the principle that selective looking helps one to command, and so attain selective knowledge.

In reading this curious character that is Clement, it is useful to know that he himself was a product of the polytheistic culture that he condemns. Despite his title, Alexandria was likely not the place of birth, rather, he may in fact have come from Athens.¹ He was likely born into a pagan family around the year 150 CE, and converted to Christianity later in life, after time spent wandering and listening to various preachers of the Christian faith in Greece, Italy, Syria, and eventually Egypt.² There, he found himself under the tutelage of Pantaenus, the head of the

¹ Butterworth 1919: xi.

² Chadwick 1966: 32.

Catechetical School of Alexandria, a hub of intellectual life and learning, where Christianity was growing in its scope and importance. Clement would later succeed Pantaenus as head of the school,³ a position he would keep until 202 CE, when the persecution of Christians under the emperor Septimus Severus forced him to flee from the city. He died approximately a decade after this, but little is known of what transpired during those ten odd years.

What is known, evidenced by his trilogy of works, is that Clement's time in Alexandria bore witness to contributions to both the religious shift and literary achievements of a period called the Second Sophistic. An era of revived learning, occurring roughly from the years 60-230 CE,⁴ and the name of which was coined by the sophist Philostratus,⁵ the Second Sophistic is generally understood as a time of re-emerging practices of classical didacticism in Greek speaking regions of the Roman Empire. This occurred chiefly through what can best be described as imitative practices of the ideal Hellenic pursuits by a privileged, all-male elite. These men, who were deemed sophists, would gather for discussion of culture and to listen to rhetorical performances in search of a higher, Greek type of learning. Devotion to the contemplation of art⁶ and philosophy marks the Second Sophistic as a time of re-invention, fascination, and imitation through Classical appeal, not only for immediate aesthetic and recreational pleasures, but to re-

³ Butterworth 1919: xii.

⁴ see "Second Sophistic" in OCD (1337).

⁵ see Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists* (1.19).

⁶ "One central idea running throughout this nexus will be that of the cultured or educated viewer, the *pepaidoumneos theates*. During the Hellenistic period, in particular in Alexandria with the foundation of the museum and the art gallery as spaces for viewing, and with the concomitant growth of the discourses of art theory, there developed the image of the sophist as viewer, an ideal of the articulate and witty analyst of imagery, uncovering hidden meanings and displaying his-and it is of course, normatively 'his'-sophia as a sign of an elite and cultivated response". Goldhill 2007:157.

situate the role of Greece under Roman rule and reassert Greek culture within this domain.⁷ Tim Whitmarsh, who provides a good, but brief written treatment of the period, elaborates on the tastes of this group of second century sophists, and characterizes the time as one whose, “aesthetic values have changed, the Romantic obsession with ‘originality’ and ‘inspiration’ has been challenged by newer emphases on ‘creative imitation’, and indeed (under the influence of postmodernism) the reception, replication, and intertextual refashioning of earlier literary works.”⁸ In a period based on observation, replication, and aesthetic imitation⁹, vision is key as a transmitter of information, and the eye could be seen as an important biological and conceptual tool. While the trends of this period, rooted in the teachings of a pagan society with an emphasis on aesthetic properties, would seem to clash with the piety of Clement, whose beliefs in monotheism and a strict moral code must contend with the public spectacle of the sophists, I think there is a connection to be found between the two. I say this because both the critics of high culture and Clement the Christian share a sophisticated understanding of human sight. And, although he stands out among other pagan second century writers who address the unusual power of sight by openly exploring and discussing it, instead offering what would seem to be an uncompromising rejection of the importance of sight, Clement actually affirms its very importance and place within second century discussion by acknowledging the scope of its repercussions, using past vision theories to formulate one that is his own.

⁷ Whitmarsh 2005: 8.

⁸ Whitmarsh 2005: 1.

⁹ Physical appearance was in fact an important part of the aesthetic movement as well that was part of sophistic performance, another element combated by Clement. Whitmarsh makes reference to Lucian's instructions for fashion in *Teacher of Rhetoric*, a contrast with Clement's case for critiquing appearance and clothing in *The Pedagogue*. For Whitmarsh's comments see Whitmarsh 2005: 26-9.

I hope to distinguish how Clement navigates the practice of looking toward the physical world, where gods are personified, with the Christian brand of spiritualism governed by a deity not physically represented, by enforcing an accountability through sight. I will access the core ideas of 5th century Greek optics through select writings of Empedocles and Plato, assessing the proposed relationships between the origins of human sight and creation, divinity, and environment. Greek inquiries in this area of pseudo-science are fused in Clement's writing with a severe Mosaic tradition of vision; a theory of sight as it relates to God and the unseen found in passages of the book of Exodus, and conveys the idea that the individual is no longer exerting a gaze upon their subject, but rather they are subjected to the rules of sight; it is not about how one understands what they see, but rather, whether they look even at all. The canonical view of imagery and observation revealed by the character Moses influences Clement approach to the moral dilemma in the act of looking, and might ask the reader whether curtailing sight is a negotiation within the realm of God's vision, or a substitution of the real world with imaginings of super-sensory visions of God. All this will aid in reading the direct interplay Clement engages in with looking at sculpture, and the deceptive and inappropriate feelings that art can potentially instill in the mind and soul. Between the capability to command sight and the obligation to control what one looks at, is Clement's treatment of vision as a composite of conventions. Recognizing the layers of tradition that synthesize to create a single world view enhances our reading of his work, and illustrates the *Protrepticus* to be a piece whose Christianity relies on combined principles of the classically Greek and Jewish.

Part 1:

Looking At Heaven and Earth

ὡς τρισόλβιοι
 κεῖνοι βροτῶν, οἱ ταῦτα δερχθέντες τέλη
 μόλωσ' ἐς Ἄιδου· τοῖσδε γὰρ μόνοις ἐκεῖ
 ζῆν ἔστι, τοῖς δ' ἄλλοισι πάντ' ἔχειν κακά

“Those thrice happy of mortals,
 who have, with their sharp sight, clearly seen the sacred rites,
 go down to Hades. For them there is life in another world,
 while for all others, there is only wretchedness. “

(Sophocles fr.837)

μηδὲ γὰρ τόδε δείμαινε, μή σε τὰ πολλὰ καὶ ἐπιτερπῆ φανταζόμενα

“For do not fear this, the many delightful visions that appear to you.”

(Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* X.85)

To describe Clement's theory of vision is to understand how he believes the action of sight to work, in terms of its power, mechanics, etc. In *The Protrepticus*, Clement covers the looking at objects, divinities, and the places where the visible and immaterial intersect. To understand the methods of sight previously developed that Clement would have been exposed to, I would like to look first six hundred years before his time, to 5th century Greece, to a period when optical science was held to a primitive understanding. Based upon reason and philosophy, theories of how the eyes sensed and relayed images rendered sight to be not just a child of science, but also mythology. Providing such an explanation for the mechanics of the human eye connect the inception of sight with ontological ideas of creation and the soul. Sight is able to be explained as an action responsible for both a person's physical and cosmological experience, in the sense that while it commands the physical world, it is governed by a mythic principle.

I would like to look at two important Greek writers of this period who offer an approach to neuroscience that is described as "extra-missive." This extra-missive theory develops a notion that the ability to look and understand images is a result of the human eye expelling a light upon its environment, framing the observer as both governing sight, and impressing something of their presence upon the environment. The Pre-Socratic natural philosopher Alcmaeon of Croton, whose birth is dated to approximately 450 BCE,¹⁰ is noted among his contemporaries as first suggesting that the human brain existed as the receptor for all our senses,¹¹ and that the eyes themselves housed a fire that actually streamed out of the pupils, mingling with the daylight in

¹⁰ Gross, *The Fire in The Eye*.

¹¹ Clement mentions Alcmaeon once in the *Protrepticus*, commenting not on his notion of the brain as the seat of human senses, but his belief that the stars themselves contained a kind of life force, earned them their status as divinities. See *Pro* V.58.

the environment and illuminating the visible world. This theory is reinforced by a contemporary to Alcmaeon,¹² a Sicilian physician-philosopher and poet named Empedocles.¹³ The extant fragments of Empedocles' poem *On Nature* offer meditations on natural philosophy, including the existence of four distinct kinds of matter perceived by humans: earth, water, fire, and air. Empedocles, like Alcmaeon, situated the brain as the locus of sense perception, and furthermore suggested that a flow of substance occurs into every sense organ of the body, including what he affirms to be light-containing eyes.¹⁴

In a fragment provided by Aristotle,¹⁵ Empedocles explains his theory of vision by likening this light within the human eye as subject to a similar process as that in which the light from a flame diffuses through a lantern shrouded in cloth. The light particles filter and project, but the flame is protected from the wind, in a fashion similar to how he believed the tissues of the eyes house allowed the projection of light from an inner, primordial flame, which itself was kept housed, as it were, by the fine optical membranes that filtered impurities and kept the organs intact. He says:

ὡς δ' ὅτε τις πρόοδον νοέων ὠπλίσσατο λύχνον,
χειμερίην διὰ νύκτα πυρὸς σέλας αἰθομένοιο,

¹² The similarities between theories of Empedocles and those of Alcmaeon, ground them together in a school of thought; both have been thought to be students of the enigmatic Pythagoras. See Gross and Wright.

¹³ Wright uses Aristotle as a source who claimed the birth of Anaxagoras to be around 500 and that Empedocles was born not long after to deduce a birth in the 490s.

¹⁴*OCD* (523).

¹⁵ Frag. preserved in Aristotle's *Sens.* 437b23.

ἄψας παντοίων ἀνέμων λαμπτήρας ἀμοργούς,
 οἳ τ' ἀνέμων μὲν πνεῦμα διασκιδνᾶσιν ἀέντων,
 φῶς δ' ἔξω διαθρῶσκον, ὅσον ταναώτερον ἦεν,
 λάμπεσκεν κατὰ βηλὸν ἀτειρέσιν ἀκτίνεσσιν·
 ὡς δὲ τότε' ἐν μήνιγξιν ἐεργμένον ὠγύγιον πῦρ
 λεπτήσιν <τ'> ὀθόνησι λοχάζετο κύκλοπα κούρην,
 αἱ δ' ὕδατος μὲν βένθος ἀπέστεγον ἀμφινάοντος,
 πῦρ δ' ἔξω δῖεσκον ὅσον ταναώτερον ἦεν.

And like one who is minded equips themselves with a lamp in advance,
 the light of a flame burning through the wintry night,
 fastening linens over lamps against all kinds of winds,
 that scatter their breath of blowing wind,
 and the light that is most diffuse leaps outside,
 shining across the threshold with unyielding rays,
 just as whenever the primal fire held in by membranes
 and fine tissues, is concealed in the pupil of the eye,
 and keeps back the deep water flowing around,
 but the fire outside that is most diffuse leaps out.

(Empedocles, *Extant Fragments* 88(84))

Empedocles' explanation is fairly pragmatic; in reality a burning flame illuminates what is near to it, so he understands a kind of fire within the eye would naturally be the principle sight-revealing component that is able to produce a field of vision. The eyes are the only connection between the primal flame within us and the outside world, setting up a contrast between an inner, absolute force of nature, and the outside unknown world that the vision-casting traveler navigates. People illuminate, through vision, the world around them, self-sufficiently and without any kind of restriction, moral or physical. They function much a like lamps themselves, housing this primal energy that informs the knowledge of their world.¹⁶ Empedocles' description of an *ὠγύγιον πῦρ* lends a primality that is evocative of creation, connecting sight to the very moment when the nature of human life is assigned. Associated with a period of pre-history, the origins of, and substantial components of vision are, like its namesake Ogyges,¹⁷ taken to be mythic. Empedocles substantiates the relationship between sight and creation even in his own writings. Preserved in another fragment, he claims that it was the goddess Aphrodite who lent sight to humans when for them when she "fashioned never tiring eyes."¹⁸ The ability to perceive clearly finds its origin in divine hands working with a primordial matter, crafting, as if one would create a sculpture, these apparatuses of sight.¹⁹ To Empedocles, human senses are gateways to

¹⁶ This is in some ways reminiscent of St. Paul's belief of the human as a walking temple that houses the Holy Spirit. See 1 Corinthians 3:16.

¹⁷ According to Eusebius, Ogygus was a primeval king of Boeotia during the time of the Great Flood. See Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* 10.10.7. The idea of a primal flood may recall the Book of Genesis.

¹⁸ Extant Fragment 85(86), provided by Simplicius in *Cael.* 529.21: ἐξ ὧν ὀμματ' ἔπηξεν ἀτειρέα δὲ Ἄφροδίτη.

¹⁹ Aphrodite also fixed natural attractive properties, following a belief that elements have a tendency to stay with their own kind. Another quote provided by Simplicius (*Cael.* 529.24) reveals γόμοις ἀσκησασα καταστόργοις Ἄφροδίτη: "Aphrodite fashioning with bonds of affection." See Wright 1995: 239-40 for his interpretation that they are "bonds of affection in that Love brings the elements together and also makes them want to stay together."

the primordial matters of creation. But vision does not rely on a communion to be upheld with the divine, beyond the moment of creation, its simply a matter of biology. The physicality is built on a hypothesis that the way the elements behave in nature behave in the same way within humans.

The fragments of Empedocles contribute a basic formulation of sight that Plato, who had many thoughts centered on vision, image, and illusion, will write more extensively on. Plato's role and influence in Clement's works is probably of the largest importance when it comes to tracing a physical understanding of sight. Plato is clearly Clement's favorite thinker given the amount he appears either directly quoted by, or clearly influencing Clement's use of words and concepts. Henry Chadwick comments on the role of Plato in Clement's similarity to him:

“Of the Greek philosophers the far the best is Plato, who hit on the truth that God is one, transcendent, and the first Cause of all things, an intuition that also comes to occasional expression in Euripides and other poets. But the radical monotheism of Christianity is the full development of this recognition that God is greater than any of his works.”²⁰

Plato planted the seed that Clement would later cultivate. It is clear that Clement not only had the *Timaeus* on hand, but had internalized its ideas; he even calls man the “τὸ οὐράνιον φυτόν”²¹ (the heavenly plant) in *Protrepticus*, the same term used by the character Timaeus in describing man

²⁰ Chadwick 1966: 39.

²¹ *Pro.* 2.22, from *Timaeus* 90 A ; cp. p. 217.

affinity with the heavenly realm. The *Timaeus* is helpful to examine because Plato's occasional reference to a single god and his description of a creation²² echoes the creation Hebrew scripture, while maintaining the Empedoclean flame hypothesis to describe and emphasize the role of vision. There is a specific passage in which the character of Timaeus, describes in further terms a flame hypothesis, beginning with the work of the gods on men:

τῶν δὲ ὀργάνων πρῶτοι' μὲν φωσφόρα ζυνετεκτίναντο ὄμματα, τοιᾶδε ἐνδήσαντες αἰτία. τοῦ πυρὸς ὅσον τὸ μὲν κάειν οὐκ ἔσχε, τὸ δὲ παρέχειν φῶς ἡμερον, οἰκειῶν ἐκάστης ἡμέρας, σῶμα ἐμηχανήσαντο γίνεσθαι. τὸ γὰρ ἐντὸς ἡμῶν ἀδελφὸν ὄν τούτου πῦρ εἰλικρινὲς ἐποίησαν διὰ τῶν ὀμμάτων ῥεῖν λεῖον καὶ πυκνὸν ὄλον μὲν, μάλιστα δὲ τὸ μέσον ζυμπλήσαντες τῶν ὀμμάτων, ὥστε τὸ μὲν ἄλλο ὅσον παχύτερον στέγειν πᾶν, τὸ τοιοῦτον δὲ μόνον αὐτὸ καθαρὸν διηθεῖν. ὅταν οὖν μεθημερινὸν ἦ φῶς περὶ τὸ τῆς ὄψεως ῥεῦμα, τότε' ἐκπίπτον ὅμοιον πρὸς ὅμοιον, ζυμπαγὲς γενόμενον, ἐν σῶμα οἰκειωθὲν ζυνέστη κατὰ τὴν τῶν ὀμμάτων εὐθυωρίαν, ὅπηπερ ἂν ἀντερείδη τὸ προσπίπτον ἐνδοθεν πρὸς ὃ τῶν ἐξω ζυνέπεσεν. ὁμοιοπαθὲς δὴ δι' ὁμοιότητα πᾶν γενόμενον, ὅτου τε ἂν αὐτὸ ποτε ἐφάπτηται καὶ ὃ ἂν ἄλλο ἐκείνου, τούτων τὰς κινήσεις διαδιδόν εἰς ἅπαν τὸ σῶμα μέχρι τῆς ψυχῆς αἰσθησιν παρέσχετο ταύτην, ἣ δὴ ὀρᾶν φαμέν.

²² “The Platonic myth of creation in the *Timaeus* he interprets as strictly parallel to Genesis, and the *Timaeus* could naturally be interpreted to support the view that the cosmos is created, not uncreated and eternal, though possessing permanence in dependence on the will of God.” (Chadwick 1966: 46).

And of the organs they constructed first light bearing eyes, and these they fixed in the face for the following reason. They contrived that all such fire as had the property not of burning but of giving a mild light should form a body akin to the light of every day. For they caused the pure fire within us which is akin to that of day, to flow through the eyes in a smooth a dense stream; and they compressed the whole substance, and especially the centre, of the eyes, so that they occluded all other fire that was coarser and allowed only this pure kind of fire to filter through. So whenever the stream of vision is surrounded by mid-day light, it flows out like unto like, and coalescing therewith it forms one kindred substance along the path of the eyes' vision, wheresoever the fire which streams from within collides with an obstructing object without. And this substance, having all become similar in its properties because of its similar nature nature, distributes the motions of every object it touches, or whereby it is touched, throughout all the body into the Soul, and brings about the sensation which we now term "seeing."

(*Tim.* 45B-D)²³

Plato, like Empedocles, has begun to set a precedent that science has a mythic and even spiritual component, and therefore there appears within the explanation of vision, an unusual implication that biology is subject to some kind of morality. It is possible that Clement expects to draw upon the assumed Platonic knowledge of the readers of *The Protrepticus*, implicitly accepting a framework of sight whose associations with creation lean somewhat towards Hebrew scripture. Timeaus has a fixation on the head as the center of the senses, describing it as that "which is the

²³ Translator R.G. Bury, 1981.

most divine of the parts of the body, ruling despotically over all things to us.”²⁴ One of the interesting suggestions made in the passage is that the light is an extension of the eye itself, in effect a temporary organ.²⁵ Plato suggests vision as a kind of extended touch, something to consider when one looks at sexual imagery. Suggesting vision to be an organ brings a tactility to looking and questions now whether an observer can truly be detached from what they look at. This, along with the idea of light bearing eyes is important to Clement because it grounds sight in cosmic terms that in some way or another seem to lead back to God’s creation of humans. Clement himself mentions light bearing eyes, and he he says:

‘έντολή δὲ κυρίου τηλαυγής, φωτίζουσα ὀφθαλμούς.’ ἀπόλαβε τὸν Χριστόν, ἀπόλαβε τὸ βλέπειν, ἀπόλαβέ σου τὸ φῶς, ὄφρ εὖ γινώσκεις ἡμὲν θεὸν ἠδὲ καὶ ἄνδρα. ‘ποθεινός’⁶ ὁ λόγος ὁ φωτίσας ἡμᾶς ‘ὑπὲρ χρυσίον καὶ λίθον τίμιον: γλυκύς⁷ ἔστιν ὑπὲρ μέλι καὶ κηρίον.’ πῶς γὰρ οὐ ποθεινός ὁ τὸν ἐν σκότει κατορωρυγμένον νοῦν ἐναργῆ ποιησάμενος καὶ τὰ ‘φωσφόρα’ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀποξύνας ‘ὄμματα’;

“The commandment of the lord shines far, giving light to eyes. Receive Christ, receive sight, receive your light, and know well both men and God. The desired Word having given light to us, above gold and precious stone He is valued. He is sweet above honey

²⁴ ὁ θεϊότατόν τ’ ἐστὶ καὶ τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν πάντων δεσποτοῦν (*Tim.* 44d.).

²⁵ Taylor 1928: 276: “the visual ray thus formed is a temporary organ of the body, and sight is due to contact of it with external objects.”

and honey comb. for how is not a desirable the one who made the mind buried in darkness visible and sharpened the light bearing eyes of the soul?"²⁶

For Clement, God fixes light bearing eyes that are directly connected to the soul. The light of the eyes comes from God but doesn't seem to have anything to do with physical seeing in the way Plato and Empedocles have described. Clement uses this mode of understanding vision instead in application to a metaphor. Instead, all that is required to see, he illustrates, is faith. Clement writes this fairly explicitly, using, of all characters to illustrate, the Greek prophet Tiresias:

σπεῦσον, Τειρεσία, πίστευσον: ὄψει: Χριστὸς ἐπιλάμπει φαιδρότερον ἡλίου, δι' ὃν ὀφθαλμοὶ τυφλῶν ἀναβλέπουσιν: νύξ σε φεύξεται, πῦρ φοβηθήσεται, θάνατος οἰχήσεται: ὄψει τοὺς οὐρανοὺς, ὦ γέρον, ὁ Θήβας μὴ βλέπων.

Hasten, Tiresias, have faith! You will see! Christ illuminates more brightly than the sun! Through him the eyes of the blind recover sight! Night will flee from you, fire will be stricken with fear, death will take flight. You will see heaven, old man, though you are not able to see Thebes.²⁷

Faith such as this is not spoken about by Plato in its relationship to sight, however, it is for this reason that Platonic thought is not enough to explain all of Clement's theory of sight. Clement would have been exposed to a Judaic influence as well, and for the people of that tradition, there are many revelations that are tied to some kind of vision.

²⁶ (*Pro.* XI.88)

²⁷ (*Pro.* XII. 93).

To provide one of the most obvious examples, appearing in Genesis, Adam and Eve eat the fruit of the tree, and are presented with the sudden vision of their nudity²⁸. They weave clothes and cover themselves but the narrative of their carefree existence becomes one of their ruination, creating a spectacle of which there may be something irrevocably damaging about prizing that which is physically tempting to us. As it is written in the scripture:

ἦδει γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ὅτι ἐν ἧ ἅν ἡμέρα φάγητε ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ, διανοιχθήσονται ὑμῶν οἱ ὀφθαλμοί, καὶ ἔσεσθε ὡς θεοὶ γινώσκοντες καλὸν καὶ πονηρὸν. καὶ εἶδεν ἡ γυνὴ ὅτι καλὸν τὸ ξύλον εἰς βρῶσιν καὶ ὅτι ἀρεστὸν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἰδεῖν καὶ ὠραῖόν ἐστιν τοῦ κατανοῆσαι καὶ λαβοῦσα τοῦ καρποῦ αὐτοῦ ἔφαγεν καὶ ἔδωκεν καὶ τῷ ἀνδρὶ αὐτῆς μετ’ αὐτῆς καὶ ἔφαγον.

“For God had known that on the day that you eat from it, your eyes would be opened, and like the gods you will know good and evil. And the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and that it was pleasing to look at with her eyes and beautiful to view and taking its fruit she ate and gave it also to her husband and after her he ate.”²⁹

Later in Genesis, another moment illustrates the revelatory power of sight. Lot’s wife is given a single command not to look back at God’s destruction of Sodom and Gomorra³⁰:

²⁸ Gen. 3:7.

²⁹(Gen. 3:5-6).

³⁰(Gen. 19:17).

Clement himself makes reference to the ordeal with Lot’s wife (*Pro. X.82*).

καὶ ἐγένετο ἡνίκα ἐξήγαγον αὐτοὺς ἔξω. καὶ εἶπαν Σώζων σῶζε τὴν σεαυτοῦ ψυχὴν· μὴ περιβλέψῃς εἰς τὰ ὀπίσω μηδὲ στῆς ἐν πάσῃ τῇ περιχώρῳ· εἰς τὸ ὄρος σώζου, μήποτε συμπαραλημθῆς. καὶ ἐπέβλεψεν ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὰ ὀπίσω καὶ ἐγένετο στήλη ἀλός.

“And it came to be at the time when they went out. and he was saying to save your own soul. do not look behind nor stand idle anywhere in the surrounding land. escape to the mountain, do not at all lest you be consumed. . . And his wife looked backwards and became a block of salt.” (Gen. 19:26).

What is suggested by this temptation of wanting to see the forbidden is that there is a critical idea in categorizing and interpreting sight as an act that is both physically and morally involved, and highly punishable, if one cannot hand over their urge to see to the need to place their conduct into a place where it is governed by faith. More stressed in the Hebrew Bible than in the collection of Greek literature and fragments, what is looked at is objectively good or bad, and if it is forbidden, there is no navigating *how* you look, and there is no freedom to interpret. People are subject to the nature of sights and once they look they have committed themselves to an act; an idea fundamental to Clement. Genesis illustrates a distinct and important relationship between vision and transgression, intentionality, and moral responsibility, temptation and seduction, themes all conveyed by Clementine rules of looking. In early Eden sight is of a physical, face-to-face sort, and deals with concrete and bodily emotion. Things look good and Adam and Eve are drawn to the beauty, and to the aesthetic:

καὶ ἐξανάτειλεν ὁ θεὸς ἔτι ἐκ τῆς γῆς πᾶν ξύλον ὠραῖον εἰς ὄρασιν καὶ καλὸν εἰς βρῶσιν
καὶ τὸ ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς ἐν μέσῳ τῷ παραδείσῳ καὶ τὸ ξύλον τοῦ εἰδέναι γνωστὸν καλοῦ
καὶ πονηροῦ

“And God caused to spring up every tree from the earth blooming and beautiful to look
upon and good to eat and the tree of life was in the middle of the garden and the tree
knew the knowing good and evil”³¹

After the fall of man there is a switch in the sort of vision that occur. Relegated to arguably
mental encounters with images, it is a sort of vision that Moses will navigate when he comes to
face God. Moses is found as a central character in Exodus. He is quoted frequently by Clement
and his narrative of sight works itself into the *Protrepticus* in its ideas of relation between soul
and eye, and talking about navigating the appearance of God. Moses takes the problem of sight
and applies it to the question of seeing God as perhaps a vision that is less physical and more
spiritually significant.

Exodus chronicles the emancipation of the Israelites from Egyptian tyranny and their
travel to find the land promised to them by God under the leadership of Moses. The question of
sight most often becomes problematic in the way God reveals himself to communicate with
Moses. When Moses approaches God on the mountain, he navigates himself around the presence
of the divinity, avoiding projecting his gaze toward Him:

³¹(Gen. 2:9).

ὤφθη δὲ αὐτῷ ἄγγελος κυρίου ἐν φλογὶ πυρὸς ἐκ τοῦ βάλτου, καὶ ὄρᾳ ὅτι ὁ βάλτος καίεται πυρί, ὁ δὲ βάλτος οὐ κατεκαίετο. εἶπεν δὲ Μωυσῆς Παρελθὼν ὄψομαι τὸ ὄραμα τὸ μέγα τοῦτο, τί ὅτι οὐ κατακαίεται ὁ βάλτος. ὡς δὲ εἶδεν κύριος ὅτι προσάγει ἰδεῖν, ἐκάλεσεν αὐτὸν κύριος ἐκ τοῦ βάλτου λέγων Μωυσῆ, Μωυσῆ. ὁ δὲ εἶπεν Τί ἐστίν; καὶ εἶπεν Μὴ ἐγγίσης ὧδε· λῦσαι τὸ ὑπόδημα ἐκ τῶν ποδῶν σου· ὁ γὰρ τόπος, ἐν ᾧ σὺ ἕστηκας, γῆ ἁγία ἐστίν. καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ θεὸς τοῦ πατρός σου, θεὸς Ἀβρααμ καὶ θεὸς Ἰσαακ καὶ θεὸς Ἰακωβ. ἀπέστρεψεν δὲ Μωυσῆς τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ· εὐλαβεῖτο γὰρ κατεμβλέψαι ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ.

And the angel of the lord appeared to him in the flame of the fire from the bush, and he saw that the bush was burning with the fire, but the bush was not burning down completely. And Moses said coming forward I will look at this great sight, why it is that the bush does not burn down. And when the lord saw that he was approaching to look, the lord called to him from the bush saying Moses, Moses. and he said what is it. and he said do not approach here. unfasten the sandals from your feet. for the place in which you have stood, is holy ground. And her said I am the god of your father, the god of Abram and Isaac and Jacob. And Moses turned away his face from him. for he was being cautious to look at God's face."³²

God appears through fire, shining, impressing something upon man but also perhaps connecting with the very source of our own sight. Moses turns his face away from God in a practice of

³² (Exod.3:2-6).

restraint and fear that was previously absent in the Genesis narrative. Moses in effect, is curtailing his own sight on account of his fear of a kind of knowledge:

“In his survey of pre-modern attitudes to sight, Martin Jay points to the truism that ‘the Greek gods were visibly manifest to humankind, which was encouraged to depict them in plastic form.’ But why was the idea of seeing and representing the gods so important in Hellenic culture? In the great monotheistic religions, by contrast, any attempt to make divinity visible must negotiate the abiding influence of the Second Commandment and the wrath of a deity who, while happy to be heard, jealously guards his prerogative to remain unseen. The partial and fleeting nature of Old Testament epiphany- the burning bush, the pillar of cloud, the ‘back parts’ of God- is in this sense inseparable from the prohibition of images and the fear of idolatry.”³³

The author calls to attention several other points in Exodus where God reveals his presence but not his form to the Israelites, creating an odd situation in which, through belief, or knowing through faith, the appearance of the divine, the people give reverence, and not through form.

Clement cites Moses in another context in which he does not gain understanding through his self-censorship, he reveals another aspect of vision that reveals its connection with the soul in exactly the way Plato revealed in Timaeus, with the images of the world entering through the eyes and descending into the person. As Moses commands:

³³ Platt 2011:11-12.

ὁ δὲ ἱερός ὄντως Μωυσῆς ‘οὐκ ἔσται,’ φησίν, ‘ἐν τῷ μαρσίπῳ σου στάθμιον καὶ
στάθμιον μέγα ἢ μικρόν, οὐδὲ ἔσται ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ σου μέτρον μέγα ἢ μικρόν, ἀλλ’ ἢ
στάθμιον ἀληθινὸν καὶ δίκαιον ἔσται σοι,’ στάθμιον καὶ μέτρον καὶ ἀριθμὸν τῶν ὄλων
ὑπολαμβάνων τὸν θεόν: τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἄδικα καὶ ἄνισα εἶδωλα οἴκοι ἐν τῷ μαρσίπῳ καὶ ἐν
τῇ ὡς ἔπος εἶπεῖν ῥυπώσῃ ψυχῇ κατακέκρυπται:

And says the truly Holy Moses “there will not be, he says, in your bag weights and
weights great or small, nor will there be in your house a measurement great or small, but
a weight true and just you will have,” weight and measure and number of the universe
supported by god. For unjust and unequal idols are at home in the bag and as that word
says hiding in a filthy soul.³⁴

Timaeus’ indication of the descent of the image to the soul is important in relation to how
Clement sites Moses as describing icons to allow sin to travel down towards the soul through the
eyes. And while the *Timaeus* links to the creation aspect of Hebrew text, and so forms a
continuity of the relationship of vision and early history of humans, Exodus provides a different
tone; sight is revealed through the severity of punishment and action, rather than the dialectic of
investigation or natural science. This severity is found in Clement, but paired with a belief in an
ideal beauty, it allows for Clement’s criticism to maintain a defense of the beautiful. This
narrative manufactures a kind of experience of viewing that both shares aspects with, and

³⁴ (VI.60)

presents alternative beliefs to Hellenic viewing, and yet still, “in both literal and metaphorical terms, vision and knowledge are fundamentally intertwined.”³⁵

Clement maintains that people were made for “worshipping the things appearing in heaven and comprehended with the mind by vision³⁶ the imagination of a deity is a mental vision. as he says: “in our view the image of God is not an object of sense made from matter perceived by the senses, but a mental object. God, that is, the only true God, is perceived not by the senses but by the mind” (117).

³⁵ Platt 2011:11.

³⁶ ἐνταῦθα φιλοσόφων παρατρέπεται χορὸς πρὸς μὲν τὴν οὐρανοῦ θεῶν παγκάλως γεγονέναι τὸν ἄνθρωπον ὁμολογούντων, τὰ δὲ ἐν οὐρανῷ φαινόμενα καὶ ὄψει καταλαμβανόμενα προσκυνούτων (*Pro.IV.55*).

Part 2

Problematic Vision: Sex and Icons

οὕτως ἄμαχόν τι ἔοικεν εἶναι ἢ δι' ὄψεως ἡδονή.

Altogether invincible, it seems, is pleasure through vision.

(Lucian, *De Domo* (19))

οἱ πλάσσοντες καὶ γλύφοντες πάντες μάταιοι οἱ ποιοῦντες τὰ καταθύμια αὐτῶν, ἃ οὐκ ὠφελήσει αὐτούς· ἀλλὰ αἰσχυνθήσονται.

All those who mould and sculpt making idols are empty minded, and that which they make is useless and shameful.

(Isaiah 44:9)

Clement's appeal to curtail our gaze is rooted in his treatment of sculpture. For him, representation through art is a breach of decency, as it attempts to imitate the creations of a world that has only one real creator. The making of sculpture is for Clement a transgression against our divine environment, and it is with this belief that his willingness to adopt Hellenic ideas ceases. Clement refuses to idea of art for art's sake, rather art has no function in society or worship. He rejects sculpture on the basis of its on its deadness and its utter lack of kinetic potential- its lifelessness and attempt to wrongly represent the divine offers nothing. He explains:

Ἀλλὰ γὰρ ἀναισθητῶ λίθῳ καὶ ξύλῳ καὶ χρυσίῳ πλουσίῳ οὐδ' ὀτιοῦν μέλει, οὐ κνίσης, οὐχ αἵματος, οὐ καπνοῦ, ᾧ δὴ τιμώμενοι καὶ τυφόμενοι ἐκμελαίνονται: ἀλλ' οὐδὲ τιμῆς, οὐχ ὕβρεως: τὰ δὲ καὶ παντός ἐστιν ἀτιμότερα ζώου, τὰ ἀγάλματα. καὶ ὅπως γε τεθείασται τὰ ἀναισθητα, ἀπορεῖν ἔπεισί μοι καὶ κατελεεῖν τοὺς πλανωμένους τῆς ἀνοίας ὡς δειλαίους: εἰ γὰρ καὶ τινα τῶν ζώων οὐχὶ πάσας ἔχει τὰς αἰσθήσεις, ὥσπερ εὐλαὶ καὶ κάμπαι καὶ ὅσα διὰ τῆς πρώτης γενέσεως εὐθὺς ἀνάπηρα φαίνεται, καθάπερ οἱ σπάλακες καὶ ἡ μυγαλῆ, ἣν φησιν ὁ Νίκανδρος 'τυφλήν τε σμερδνήν τε': ἀλλὰ γε ἀμείνους εἰσὶ τῶν ξοάνων τούτων καὶ τῶν ἀγαλμάτων τέλεον ὄντων κωφῶν:

For there is no senseless stone, nor wood, nor abundant gold, that takes heed of the smell of fat, blood, or smoke. Indeed, men honor and raise smoke for them, and they are just tainted by this. They do not take heed of honor, nor of insolence. And the images remain more dishonorable than every living thing. In this way the things without sense have been worshipped as divine, and I have compassion upon the ones straying in their

want of understanding, these wretched men who seem to me to be without means. For although not all living things possess sense, just as worms, and caterpillars, and as many as those who from their birth straightaway appeared crippled, just as moles and the field mouse, which Nicander says are “blind and terrible to look at,” at least they are better than these statutes and images which are dumb and silent.³⁷

This passage comes from section four of the *Protrepticus*, perhaps the richest section of the work when it comes to the examination of Clement’s theory of viewing. The section deals primarily with Clements critique of the plastic arts, most frequently sculpture in the form of pagan idols. He insists that idols are wholly a bad thing, because they doesn't really enlighten people but it instead make them obsessive over their humanness. Art distorts the form that he believes God had implemented through his work creating the world through a base kind of materialism. In essence, the creation of sculpture asserts man’s arrogance to say that he is above God, that he may pervert God’s creations so as to sculpt and idolize that as his own and to imitate the divine position of a creator. This clearly undermines what Chadwick calls the “the radical monotheism of Christianity that God is greater than any of his works.”³⁸

The purpose of Clement’s work becomes to remove the idea that man can on his own place the divine in a visible practice that relies on idols, and instead to move to a practice in the

³⁷ *Pro.*IV.45.

³⁸ Chadwick 1966: 39.

mind, where ordinary vision no longer serves to inform. These opposing ideas, which pit sculpted matter against the realm of the unearthly, are summarized by Clement here:

ἔστιν γὰρ ὡς ἀληθῶς τὸ ἄγαλμα ὕλη νεκρὰ τεχνίτου χειρὶ μεμορφωμένη: ἡμῖν δὲ οὐχ ὕλης αἰσθητῆς αἰσθητόν, νοητὸν δὲ τὸ ἄγαλμά ἐστιν. νοητόν, οὐκ αἰσθητόν ἐστὶ τὸ ἄγαλμα ὁ θεός, ὁ μόνος ὄντως θεός.

For the image is truly raw, dead matter shaped by the hand of the artisan. And to us it [God] is not a perceptible thing from perceptible matter, but His image is a thinkable thing, perceived by the mind. A thing sensed by the mind, not the other perceptions, is the image of God, the only real God. (*Pro IV.45*)

The divine nature of the icons, constructed from this dead matter, is bestowed by the views of their worshippers. Idols do not reveal themselves as gods to people, rather people choose to think of their sculpture as their god. This makes them valueless in true religious and practical function, because they ignore divine truth and instead try to fabricate it. For Clement, they are inanimate and senseless; their lack of perception prevents them understanding the reverence which men pay them through their offering, and divine title they place on them. Seeing defines how an object is treated, and how a neutral object, whose sense of perception not reciprocal, and is hence subject to be malleable in definition, can be given a spiritual function simply through how it is seen by its worshipper, which ultimately, has nothing to do with truth. Such is the subjectivity of art. Clement is persistent in maintaining that God exists in the mind, but might fear that a pagan who thinks a statue is divine, makes any object divine in this way, and in their eyes the statue

comes to serve this purpose. With deification based upon visual appeal and physical objects of worship, and with no distinctions between what can or can't be deified, vision becomes a tool for unbridled heathenism where the decision to make objects holy and people creators can run amuck. Devotion does not take place in a realm of ephemeral images, practice itself is in opposition to physical representation.

Images made by men not only find no redemption, but can go so far as to infest with their impiousness, making them not just without value, but dangerous as well. Their aesthetic appeal is to Clement “not merely irrelevant but an actual snare if it expresses a corrupt moral attitude.”³⁹ Their power to corrupt moral value lies in their potential to please and to gratify the senses, indeed, even sexually.⁴⁰ As Plato's theory of the eyes hinted at, looking can be an extended touch with ones surrounds, making the potential for inappropriate behavior simply by looking very high. He provides an example:

Ἀλλ' οὐ ταῦτα φρονοῦσιν οἱ πολλοί: ἀπορρίψαντες δὲ τὴν αἰδῶ καὶ τὸν φόβον οἴκοι τοὺς τῶν δαιμόνων ἐγγράφονται πασηγιασμούς. πινακίοις γοῦν τισὶ καταγράφοις μετεωρότερον ἀνακειμένοις προσεσηκότες ἀσελγεία τοὺς θαλάμους κεκοσμήκασι, τὴν ἀκολασίαν εὐσέβειαν νομίζοντες: κάπῃ τοῦ σκίμποδος κατακείμενοι παρ' αὐτὰς ἔτι τὰς περιπλοκάς ἀφορῶσιν εἰς τὴν Ἀφροδίτην ἐκείνην τὴν γυμνὴν, τὴν ἐπὶ τῇ συμπλοκῇ

³⁹ Chadwick 1966:37.

⁴⁰ Clement also discusses the ultimate form of deceit through sensuality as falling in love with a statue (*agalmatophilia*), specifically in the case of Pygmalion. Pygmalion's love for his work is not simply an adoration, but leads him to commit lewd behavior that itself is a sin for Clement.

δεδεμένην, καὶ τῇ Λήδᾳ περιποτώμενον τὸν ὄρνιν τὸν ἐρωτικόν, τῆς θηλότητος
 ἀποδεχόμενοι τὴν γραφήν, ἀποτυποῦσι ταῖς σφενδόνας, σφραγίδι χρώμενοι καταλλήλῳ
 τῇ Διὸς ἀκολασίᾳ. ταῦτα ὑμῶν τῆς ἡδυπαθείας τὰ ἀρχέτυπα, αὐταὶ τῆς ὕβρεως αἱ
 θεολογίαι, αὐταὶ τῶν συμπορνευόντων ὑμῖν θεῶν αἱ διδασκαλίαι: ‘ὁ γὰρ βούλεται, τοῦθ’
 ἕκαστος καὶ οἶεται’ κατὰ τὸν Ἀθηναῖον ῥήτορα. οἴαι δὲ αὖ καὶ ἄλλαι ὑμῶν εἰκόνες,
 πανίσκοι τινὲς καὶ γυμναὶ κόραι καὶ σάτυροι μεθύοντες καὶ μορίων ἐντάσεις, ταῖς
 γραφαῖς ἀπογυμνούμεναι, ἀπὸ τῆς ἀκρασίας ἐλεγχόμεναι. ἤδη δὲ ἀναφανδὸν τῆς
 ἀκολασίας ὅλης τὰ σχήματα ἀνάγραπτα πανδημεὶ θεώμενοι οὐκ αἰσχύνεσθε, φυλάττετε
 δὲ ἔτι μᾶλλον ἀνακείμενα, ὥσπερ ἀμέλει τῶν θεῶν ὑμῶν τὰς εἰκόνας, στήλας
 ἀναισχυντίας καθιερώσαντες οἴκοι, ἐπ’ ἴσης ἐγγραφόμενοι τὰ Φιλαινίδος σχήματα ὡς τὰ
 Ἰπρακλέους ἀθλήματα. τούτων οὐ μόνον τῆς χρήσεως, πρὸς δὲ καὶ τῆς ὄψεως καὶ τῆς
 ἀκοῆς αὐτῆς ἀμνησίαν καταγγέλλομεν. ἠταίρηκεν ὑμῖν τὰ ὄψα, πεπορνεύκασιν οἱ
 ὀφθαλμοὶ καὶ τὸ καινότερον πρὸ τῆς συμπλοκῆς αἱ ὄψεις ὑμῖν μεμοιχεύκασιν. ὃ
 βιασάμενοι τὸν ἄνθρωπον καὶ τὸ ἔνθεον τοῦ πλάσματος ἐλέγχει ἀπαράξαντες, πάντα
 ἀπιστεῖτε, ἵνα ἐκπαθαίνησθε:

But not many men think these things. And casting aside their shame and fear at home
 they are engraving an unnatural lust of the *daimons*. therefore with painted tablets set as
 offerings hung high having been devoted to licentiousness having adorned their
 bedrooms, holding licentiousness as piety. and lying upon their bed towards them still
 within their entwinements they look, having in full view that naked Aphrodite, bound in a
 sexual embrace, and to Leda a amorous bird hovering about, accepting the signs of

womanhood, they stamp it to the hoops of their rings, proclaiming with a seal corresponding to the licentiousness of Zeus. These are the patterns of your luxuries, the very theologies of hubris, the very teachings of your fornicating gods. For whatever a man wishes for, he also believes to be true, according to an Athenian orator. and look once more to other of your images, some of Pan and nude girls and drunken saytrs and obscenities, plainly visible in pictures, disgraced from their unwholesomeness. And now, as you gaze on, before the eyes of all the painted forms of altogether licentiousness, you are without shame! And setting them up, dedicating them, you keep and cherish them very much, just as if they actually are images of your gods, dedicating shameless monuments in your homes, with equal attention the figures of Philaenis as the labors of Heracles. Of these things not only their use, but both the sight and the hearing of them we declare to be forgotten. your ears have been in indecent company, your eyes have been prostituted! And before your embrace, without precedent your appearances have committed adultery. O you who has wronged man and crushed gods image in disgrace, you are disbelievers of all things in order that you be overcome by passions.⁴¹

The above quote above integrates act and image, as Goldhill explains “Men look at pictures of naked Aphrodite bound in sexual embrace (as she was caught by Hephaestus’ nets in the act of adultery), while they are in the very embrace of the sexual act. (Thus a remarkable first century mirror cover- itself a significant object both for the dynamics of mimesis and for it associations with desire and decoration- represents a couple making love on a bed, and on the wall of the

⁴¹ *Pro IV.53.*

room there is a picture of a couple making love; the mirror with a scene mirrored by a picture creates a fine *min-en-abime* of the interplay of the image and the act of sex, or the role of imaging in sexuality).⁴²

Here it is clear that sight is mirrored in action and the mere looking itself is reflected in sex. To Clement, “the scientific knowledge of how the eye works is fully integral to the ludic and collusive deceptions of erotic narrative”⁴³ Clement urges pagans to understand that there are implications of looking at what they choose or choose not to direct attention towards, that often translate into physical acts. There is no privacy of looking or secret adoration when one is lead to commit action. Vision is not held in personal secrecy, also, because individual vision is subject to rules that follow certain Christian declarations of morals that are overseen by an omniscient God.

⁴² Goldhill 2001: 174.

⁴³ Goldhill 2001: 172.

Conclusion

One might say that a theme of Clement's time and work is both revival and transition- a revival of certain aspects of Greek and Jewish philosophy and thought, and an appropriation of those ideas to his time in a way in which a transition away from an emphasis on looking at objects. Clement brings many questions of vision to the forefront in his writing, through a blatant criticism of representation without casting aside the idea of beauty itself that leaves us with one understanding of his philosophy, that the beautiful *does* exist, but may not be measured in man's crafts. Says Goldhill, "Clement, for all that he is a central figure in the church hierarchy in Alexandria, speaks for a marginal and aggressive religion that is fighting for monotheistic space in polytheistic multicultural Alexandria (as well as for his Hellenized version of Christianity within the church)." ⁴⁴ *The Protrepticus* is Clement attempt to persuade the Greeks to reject idolatry and accept Christ, by attacking the morality of representational art and iconography.

Clement's treatment of icons brings into question many ideas about the way people see art and representation, in both religious an social terms, and categorize, through art, the way we interpret how Gods are seen, what experience is attained through looking, the nature of physical perception and the sense imagination of the mind, and ultimately, why much of this can be a corruption of the truth in the world. Chadwick ultimately says, "Clement and they belong equally

⁴⁴ Goldhill 2001: 180.

to an intellectual society where philosophical speculation is moving almost wholly within a framework of ideas laid down by Greek philosophers five or six hundred years previously, with the natural consequence that philosophy has become scholasticism and the instinct for scholarship has turned to an antiquarian passion for amassing facts.”⁴⁵ and “Although he finds himself somewhat immersed in Greek knowledge, he is aggressively opposed to the cultural endeavors into the arts when they express pagan morality, beauty of form is not substantial, and is only in line with the materialism he rejects, which is similarly applied to religion as well, as Greek attribution even of elemental forces to gods rather than idol statues still fails to represent the comic transcendence that is the deity.”⁴⁶ The eyes have a way of perceiving, or conveying truth beyond the physical, suggesting a kind of looking, or metaphor of looking, that Clement will come to involve himself in as well. But even the eyes can be fooled, and in this was idols pose a grave threat to piety. Clement discusses the how the viewing images can negatively affect spectators, and indeed, as he quotes Moses to show, reflect the state of the soul, and conceive a humans “vision” of God as a metaphorical sight that is tied with knowledge. While the connection of sight with a higher cosmic reality, be it the soul or a creation myth, was not a new idea for the second century, it enters a new state of negotiation under Clement, who makes use of the widespread interest and knowledge of Greek learning to ultimately prove its folly it through the topic of sight, in order to strengthen his Christian cause.

⁴⁵ Chadwick 1966: 36.

⁴⁶ Chadwick 1966: 37-8.

Clement's frustration stems from his belief that the awareness of this folly is difficult for viewers to engage with. These viewers are more often than not beguiled by the meaning they give to mere physical presence of images. As he comments on the interaction and potential danger of viewership and spiritual devotion, he asserts that their blindness has caused a perversion of the sacred: "You have made heaven a stage, and your god into a dramatic play! You have treated that which is holy as a comedy under masks of the divine!"⁴⁷ Clement has implied that the nature of the gaze is so powerful as to threaten the piety of living at the expense of pleasure. Ultimately the responsibility of sight is granted fully to the viewer, which to Clement, makes it a potentially damaging tool.

Though Clement was not a sophist in the sense of their others and their leisurely artistic pursuits, and events of "rhetorical mastery,"⁴⁸ Clement does offer his own *sophia*, and he does, in his writing achieve what Verity Platt denotes as characteristic of the period as a "broader motivation of Second Sophistic thinkers to recover and preserve their religious and cultural history"⁴⁹, although Clement ultimately uses what is recovered to uproot the very pillars supporting Hellenic paganism. Clement writes in a way that Simon Goldhill describes as a manner that "absorbs and redirects Greek philosophy towards a Christian belief and practice."⁵⁰ Clement treats both Judaism and Greek religion as movements that lean toward the truth but

⁴⁷ σκηνην πεποιήκατε τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὸ θεῖον ὑμῖν δράμα γεγένηται καὶ τὸ ἅγιον προσωπεῖοις δαιμονίων κεκωμωδήκατε. . . (*Protrepticus* IV.52).

⁴⁸ Whitmarsh 2005: 15.

⁴⁹ Platt 2011: 8.

⁵⁰ Goldhill 2001:172.

provide incomplete explanations of the ultimate nature of God, similar to Paul's explanation of Judaism within the framework of the Christian narrative.⁵¹ These practices seem diametrically opposed in their approach to looking the way they understand seeing. The way gods and god functioned in these cultures differ; for Judaism, the notion of an all encompassing monotheism calls for a deity that remains unseen, yet pervasive of all nature.⁵² In contrast, the importance to represent deities in the culture of Greek tradition upheld a system of varied deities, what Verity Platt describes as a "fluid system" with "strong local traditions and highly specific taxonomies of divinity."⁵³ Yet taken together within the context of his writing, they provide a foundation for much of the nascent Christian beliefs on images and sight that he advocates in *Protrepticus*. The power of the eyes has been, since times even before Clement, held to be the most informative of the senses. Indeed, Platt tells us that, "In Greek thought, it is the eyes, rather than the ears, that give access to truth: as Aristotle claimed, 'we prefer sight (το ὄραον), generally speaking, to all the other senses. The reason of this is that of all the senses, sight best helps us to know things (γνωρίζειν) and reveals (δηλοῖ) many distinctions."⁵⁴ Clement picks up on this idea, from both the writings of Plato and Old Testament text, and translates the ideas into his own terms, where the eyes must be used cautiously to inform what a person sees, not to refute the beauty that lie in the world, but man made perversions that threaten to obscure it. To Clement, "All wisdom is summed up in Christ, who is, as it were, the keystone of the arch of knowledge and its uniting principle. Both the Old testament and Greek philosophy are alike tutors to bring us to Christ and

⁵¹ see Paul's Letter to the Galatians.

⁵² See Exodus 20:4-6.

⁵³ Platt (2011:12).

⁵⁴ Platt 2011:11.

are both tributaries of the one great river of Christianity.”⁵⁵ Clement, stands firmly at an intersection of the Hellenic and the Judaic, framed by an emphasis on vision that is crucial to the modes of his time. Clement, in his appeal to the interests of an elite group, attempts to Hellenize Christianity framed by an emphasis on vision that is crucial to the modes of his time, and seeks the application of philosophy to elucidate truth⁵⁶ giving some relevance to the past but setting a new precedent for the future. This is a future of not only a discriminate viewer, but one whose discrimination abides by a moral code by understanding between what is and is not acceptable to see and to create for aesthetic purpose. Greek pagans need to understand that the implications of looking at what they choose or choose not to direct attention towards and thus exert command over their knowing. In this way the process of looking is linked to regulation by the mind hence a regulation of thought. Thoughts need not reject beauty itself, but rather perversions of it in man made images that convey a false knowledge of nature. Says Goldhill “The vocabulary of Greek intellectual discourse, framing the Christian theology is marked here: not just in the Platonic tone of the deceptiveness of *techné* or the seductions of *mimesis* (even to the point of copulating with a statue), but also in the verb *εναποματτω*, ‘impress.’ So, indeed, the threat of idolatry is located precisely in the corruption of the visual.”⁵⁷ Defining images as a subjects of human sight is a central concern, and difficult when moving from tangible icons to images of the metaphysical. The idea that in the ancient world, images, in the same way they preserved historical moments, functioned in a pragmatic way to resolve a problem, is not Clement’s outlook rather they complicate it by obscuring knowledge through distracting, empty images. John Berger indicates

⁵⁵ Chadwick (1966: 40).

⁵⁶ Albert C. Outler, The “Platonism” of Clement of Alexandria 217.

⁵⁷ Goldhill 2001:173.

that in the ancient world such images responded to the mysteries of nature and to “conjure up the appearances of something that was absent.”⁵⁸ Whether this indicates a symbolic placement where the holy is otherwise missing, or if actual taking on of that absent holiness occurs, is a contentious subject, but for Clement, it seems like it may be a mute point; the role of an icon, or any object that is granted a holy meaning, is dependent entirely on the way it is viewed by its audience regardless of where it occurs. And to Clement, it is always a sign of falsity. Sight as an experience governed by the individual suggests the real power one demonstrates by looking; that perception can dictate the given meaning. But giving meaning itself to what should remain recognized as a true reflection of God and nature can often become a perversion. Clement warns:

αἰσχρόν ἐστι τὸ κάλλος ὕβρει μεμαραμμένον. μὴ τυραννίσης, ἄνθρωπε, τοῦ κάλλους μηδὲ ἐνουβρίσης ἀνθοῦντι τῷ νέῳ: τήρησον αὐτὸ καθαρὸν, ἵνα ᾗ καλόν. βασιλεὺς τοῦ κάλλους γενοῦ, μὴ τύραννος: ἐλεύθερον μεινάτω: τότε σου γνωρίσω τὸ κάλλος, ὅτε καθαρὰν τετήρηκας τὴν εἰκόνα: τότε προσκυνήσω τὸ κάλλος, ὅτε ἀληθινὸν ἀρχέτυπὸν ἐστι τῶν καλῶν.

“Beauty that is wasted away by insolence is a disgraceful thing. Do not govern tyrannically, o man, nor let you insult to a blooming from beauty youth. watch over the very purity, in order that is be beautiful. Be a king of beauty, not a tyrant. Let it remain free. I will make known each beautiful of you, when a pure image you have watched over. I will worship any beautiful thing, when it is a true model of beautiful things.”⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Berger 1972: 10.

⁵⁹ (*Pro* IV.43).

Clement attempts to control the perception of a group of individuals to assimilate them into a single system of beliefs and utilizing their philosophies to redefine a viewing experience as ethical in a way integral to the formation of his Christian understandings. As Clement says: “For what is at stake in looking is your very soul, the truth of things. How you look is part of your relation to God.”⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Goldhill 2001:174.

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