The Relationship of Disciples and Teachers in Ancient Biography

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I. Introduction

As long as humans have been engaged in the practice of transmitting information to one another, there has existed, in some form or another, a relationship between the relayer of information and the receiver of information. The normative identities of these individuals varied by their position in history: in one place and time perhaps a local religious leader imparted knowledge to their community; in another, a classically trained rhetor schooled well-born pupils in Cicero. The inherent flexibility of the relationship makes precise definition difficult – from a microscopic point of view. If analyzed with less focus, however, it is possible to identify patterns and general characteristics – and, notably, an understanding of what the relationship was *not*.

Within the few centuries before and after the birth of Christ, several distinct teaching groups emerged: those focused on religious matters, those focused on philosophical matters, and those focused on rhetorical matters. Of course, other groups in society also engaged in knowledge transference from time to time (e.g., parents teaching children, an artisan teaching an apprentice), but, with few exceptions, those individuals whose social responsibility was teaching *qua* teaching fell into one of the three aforementioned groups. While teachers from each of these groups could be discussed in their own right, they will be examined together below due to the fact that they all had what we might term disciples (coming from Latin *discipulus*, "student", and ultimately from *discere*, "to learn") – individuals whose "full time job" was learning.

Much of what can be gleaned of the relationship between these teachers and their disciples come from the biographies of the former – in many cases written directly by the latter, or with direct influence from the latter. These Lives play such an important part in the identification of relationship dynamics because they provide a glimpse into the shared circumstances of teachers and their disciples, and the interactions the two groups have with each

other therein. Regardless of the subject matter – be it a travelling holy man like Apollonius of Tyana or a city-sponsored sophist like Libanius – ancient biographies provide insight into exactly how teachers treated their students, and how students treated their teachers.

This paper will focus specifically upon Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*, Libanius' autobiography, and the Christian gospels. All these Lives portray the relationship between disciples and teachers as more than just a transference of knowledge; while some aspects of the relationship differ between works, disciples are consistently presented not as passive listeners, but as active participants in the lives of their teachers, and, in many cases, as important agents in the transmission of their legacies.

II. On Teachers as Former Students

One of the peculiarities of teaching as an occupation is that all teachers were at one point students themselves, so their interaction with their disciples will never be entirely clear of their own experiences *as* disciples. For this reason, before starting an analysis of the relationship proper, it is prudent to briefly examine the educational background of our biographical subjects.

Porphyry describes Plotinus as starting his study of philosophy late in life, stating that "In his twenty-eighth he felt the impulse to study philosophy and was recommended to the teachers in Alexandria who then had the best reputation; but he came away from their lectures so depressed and full of sadness that he told his trouble to one of his friends."[1] Plotinus' dissatisfaction with his teachers led him to Ammonius, whom he then proceeded to study with for 11 years, "acquir[ing] so complete a training in philosophy that he became eager to make acquaintance with the Persian philosophical condition and that prevailing among the Indians."[2]

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[1] A. H. Armstrong, trans., *Plotinus I: Porphyry on Plotinus, Ennead 1* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 9.
[2] Ibid.

Plotinus' experiences regarding subpar teachers likely shaped his own practices as a teacher, a role he assumed when he settled in Rome at the age of forty. Additionally, his intention to learn of the eastern philosophical traditions suggests that Plotinus retained a desire to continue his own learning even after he attained a high level of knowledge.

Philostratus presents Apollonius as an astute learner from a very young age. His teacher in the doctrines of Pythagoras – Euxenus – is said to be "devoted to gluttony and sex, and patterned after Epicurus,"[3] yet Apollonius learned from him all the same, soon surpassing him "like those young eagles with wings still undeveloped that fly by their parents as they practice flight under their guidance; when they are able to soar they rise higher than their parents."[4] After this, Apollonius effectively ceased formal training, but continued to grow in his wisdom as he traveled and matured; a degree of his knowledge seems to have come from the gods directly. Later in his life, he also traveled to Persia to have discussions with the Magi, India to have discussions with the Sages, and Ethiopia to have discussions with the Gymnosophists – the same sort of trips Plotinus intended to make but never did. While not "learning" in the sense of formal study, the discussions from these trips show that Apollonius continued to develop his thought over the course of his life.

Jesus is portrayed only once in the New Testament in the position of learner, when he was twelve years old. Luke 2:46-47 states that after three days of searching for him, Mary and Joseph "found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers." Similar to Apollonius, Jesus is presented as being incredibly perceptive for his age, and no further teachers

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[3] Christopher P. Jones, trans., *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana: Books I-IV* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 45.
[4] Ibid., 47.

are mentioned after this incident. In Christian theology, the doctrine of *kenosis* holds that Jesus' divine nature was limited during the incarnation, meaning that he had to learn like any other human being.[5] By the time his public ministry began at the age of thirty, Jesus had a thorough understanding of the Old Testament, as demonstrated by his frequent quotations from the Torah and the Psalms in his teaching.

Finally, Libanius speaks of his own education in terms of sacrifice. After a childhood lacking formal study, Libanius says he started studying to the exclusion of other pursuits:

> [W]hen I was nearly fifteen my interest was kindled and an earnest love of study began to possess me…I sold my pigeons, pets which are apt to get a strong hold on a boy; the chariot races and everything to do with the stage were discarded, and I remained aloof, far from the sight of those gladiatorial combats where men … used to conquer or die.[6]

He later mentions the fact that he was somewhat of a bad student early on: "my attendance was not as regular as it should have been but occurred only in a most perfunctory fashion."[7] As he developed, however, he was so determined to learn that he would follow his teacher around "book in hand, even through the city square, and he had to give me some instruction, whether he liked it or not."[8] This stage of progression makes Libanius different than Apollonius and Jesus who were presented as dedicated from a very early age, and Plotinus, who didn't start his study until he was twenty-eight and fully mature. Libanius eventually ended up in Athens among the warring factions of teachers and disciples, but relates how he stayed above the fray, as it were, to complete his education.

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[5] Although Christian theology also holds that his understanding of doctrine was perfect and more complete on account of his divinity. The exact mechanics of *kenosis* are quite involved, and outside the scope of this paper.
[6] A. F. Norman, trans. *Libanius: Autobiography and Selected Letters I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 57-58.
[7] Ibid., 61.
[8] Ibid.

All of these backgrounds show that the teachers were once students in some sense – even Jesus and Apollonius. However, they all also demonstrate the exceptionality of these individuals, both in the effort they put in and in the sacrifices they made. This exceptionality can perhaps explain why their disciples could not always understand what it is they were saying.

III. On Disciples Not Understanding Their Teachers

A theme consistent throughout the Lives of Apollonius, Jesus, and Plotinus is a fundamental inability of their followers to comprehend certain points they made. While many more examples could be adduced for each teacher, the ones introduced below serve as an introduction to the concept: despite the transmittance of knowledge being the purpose of the relationship's existence, sometimes communication broke down and disciples failed to grasp their teacher's meaning.

Perhaps the most telling occurrence of this phenomenon in the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* is Apollonius' conversation with Damis about mountains and divinity. In 2.5, Apollonius poses a long series of questions to Damis as they are crossing the Caucuses regarding the notion that being closer to the sky, where the land is uncorrupted by human habitation, necessarily gives one some sort of knowledge of the divine. Despite Apollonius' questions leading Damis to accept the fact that this is ultimately not the case, he remains skeptical throughout the entire exchange, as if he believes Apollonius but does not really understand him. In his last reply, he states

> I thought I would be wiser when I descended, Apollonius, having heard that Anaxaoras of Clazomenae observed the heavenly bodies from Mimas in Ionia, as Thales of Miletus did from nearby Mycale. Some people, they say, have used Pangaeus for advanced study, and others Athos. But though I have climbed this mountain I shall come down it none the wiser.[9]

[9] Christopher P. Jones, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana: Books I-IV*, 141.

It is not impermissible to understand Apollonius' initial response after this statement, *οὐδὲ γαρ ἐκεῖνοι,*[10] as answering an implied question on Damis' part: "you say I will gain no insight from climbing this mountain – but look, these other people seemed to get insight from climbing mountains, so why not me?" Even though Apollonius has just gone through step by step why Damis' view is misguided – based upon his own statements no less– Damis still questions him further.

The New Testament displays a similar incident in the disciples' response to Jesus' warning in Matthew 16:6: "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." The disciples, after discussing the statement among themselves, decide that Jesus is telling them this because they didn't bring any bread with them (Matthew 16:7) – an idea that seems laughable to us, but actually isn't terribly illogical given these groups' hatred of Jesus and plots to kill him. This situation is a good example of the disciples' difficulty with Jesus' heavy use of imagery in his parables and teaching – Jesus would use something figuratively, and the disciples would entirely miss the point by taking it too literally. Very often this would require him to explain the meaning of his parable to them separately, as with the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:18-23, cf. Mark 4:13-20, Luke 8:11-15).

An instance of this disconnect stands out in the *Life of Plotinus* as well. When Amelius "grew ritualistic" and asked Plotinus to go around visiting the temples at the New Moon and the feasts of the gods, Plotinus responded "They ought to come to me, not I to them."[11] Porphryry states "What he meant by this exalted utterance we could not understand and did not dare to ask."[12] It must be remembered that in this situation Amelius has been with Plotinus for more than

[10] Ibid., 140.
[11] A. H. Armstrong, *Porphyry on Plotinus*, 35.
[12] Ibid.

18 years,[13] so it is not at all like this is some sort of misunderstanding due to age or inexperience on the part of Plotinus' disciples – in this situation, they genuinely do not understand what it is he is saying.

The conclusion to draw from these examples is not that disciples were constantly misunderstanding their teachers or incapable of thinking on the same level as them, but rather that communication was not always perfect, and that differences in perspective sometimes caused barriers in effective comprehension. Much of the time, situations like those described above could be eliminated by disciples asking questions proactively.

IV: On Disciples Asking Questions

The Lives portray a relationship in which disciples could freely pose questions to their teachers. This is significant because it implies that they had enough autonomy in the relationship to control what topics were covered, at least to an extent. Rather than being listeners all the time, disciples could actively participate in discussions and drive the direction of study.

Porphyry states that Plotinus actively encouraged questions: "Since he encouraged his students to ask questions, the course was lacking in order and there was a great deal of pointless chatter, as Amelius told us."[14] It is interesting that Amelius thought that Plotinus was *too* willing to answer questions; we may hypothesize that his irritation lies in his advanced age and progress compared to other disciples. Porphyry also tells us that Plotinus viewed questions as a necessary part of the intellectual process:

> Once I, Porphyry, went on asking him questions for three days about the soul's connection with the body, and he kept explaining to me. A man named Thausanias came in, who was interested in general statements and said that he wanted to hear Plotinus speaking in the manner of a set treatise, but could not stand Porphyry's questions and

[13] Amelius had been with Plotinus 18 years already when Porphyry arrived; see A. H. Armstrong, *Porphyry on Plotinus*, 13.
[14] Ibid., 11.

> answers. Plotinus said "But if when Porphyry asks questions we do not solve his difficulties we shall not be able to say anything at all to put into the treatise."[15]

To Plotinus, then, there was absolutely nothing wrong with disciples taking the initiative to inquire about things they wished explained, effectively giving them the power to set the topic of discussion.

Jesus was also happy to explain things when asked. One of the most prophetic sections of his teaching – the Olivet discourse – actually came about when he was asked about the circumstances and signs accompanying the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. According to Mark, after prophesying that "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down,"[16] "Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, 'Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?'"[17] Jesus' answer to their question spans the remaining length of the chapter – verse 5 through verse 36. Jesus also answered disciples' questions many other places throughout the four gospels – and not just questions relating to the interpretation of parables. He is never portrayed as being frustrated or irritated by questions (though sometimes saddened by his disciples' lack of faith), but rather, patient and thorough.

Apollonius too spoke on the matters that his disciples were interested in, at their request. In 4.15, Damis proves to be a nuisance to the discussions that Apollonius is having with others about the islands they came across, shipbuilding, and the pilot's craft. When Apollonius asks him why he is disrupting the discussions, he reveals that he wants to hear Apollonius speak of his encounter with the spirit of Akhilleus: "There is an important subject before us … which it is

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[15] Ibid., 39.
[16] Mark 13:2
[17] Mark 13:3-4

proper for us to raise, but we are raising old and tired ones."[18] Instead of reproving Damis for his disruptive behavior, Apollonius goes on to recount his experiences. Here again we see the power of the disciple to control the topic being discussed; Damis effectively blocked conversation on other topics until the topic he wanted to hear was addressed.

As these examples show, disciples had enough authority to control the conversational direction, at least at times. This observation contradicts the view that disciples were merely passive followers, instead supporting the view that they were active participants in the processes that led to their own learning. In fact, under some conditions, disciples were not followers at all, but were given authority by their teachers to pass on knowledge themselves.

V: On Disciples Being Given Authority

When teachers were unable to address concerns due to considerations of distance, volume, or busyness, disciples were sometimes given authority to act as if they spoke for the teacher directly. In giving them such power, it is clear that teachers generally trusted their disciples – both with respect to their knowledge/competence, and their character.

This can be seen in the New Testament when Jesus sends his disciples out in pairs: since he could not visit multiple cities at the same time, he instead sends disciples out with his authority. Matthew 10 describes the sending of the twelve Apostles:

> These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay.

Most interpreters take the statement "you received without paying" as referring to the authority that Jesus gave them (cf. Mark 6:7). In Luke's report of a similar situation with 70 disciples,[19]

[18] Christopher P. Jones, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana: Books I-IV*, 349.
[19] Or 72, depending upon the manuscript. Sinaiticus has 70.

Jesus says "Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me."[20] In this statement we see the extent of the authority Jesus vested them with; if someone rejected the words of the disciples whom Jesus had commissioned, it would be as if they rejected Jesus himself (and thus the Father as well).

Porphyry relates a situation that deals more with insufficient time than an inability to be multiple places at once. In several places, Amelius is described as defending Plotinus' positions against challenges, not Plotinus himself. For example, when the charge is leveled against Plotinus that he was appropriating the ideas of Numenius, Porphyry says that Amelius "wrote a book to which we gave the title 'On the difference between the Doctrines of Plotinus and Numenius.'" Additionally, when Porphyry himself was challenging Plotinus (when he first met him), Plotinus had Amelius disabuse him of his views: "You shall have the task of solving these difficulties Amelius. He has fallen into them because he does not know what we hold." In this pattern of behavior – wherein Amelius writes on Plotinus' doctrine as though he were Plotinus himself – we see another instance of a disciple taking on their master's authority.

VI: On Teachers' Care for Their Disciples

In all the biographies, teachers are portrayed as caring for the well-being of their disciples, filling in a somewhat paternal role. This is not surprising in and of itself, but it does confirm that there is a power gap between disciples and teachers; if teachers care for their disciples like fathers care for their children, they implicitly carry more authority than their disciples, just as fathers carry more authority than their children do.

[20] Luke 10:16

Libanius describes himself as being very distraught at the deaths of his pupils – similar to his distress upon his brother's death – as if they too were part of his family. In fact, he himself uses the father/son metaphor:

> Now, if a father is unhappy when he has consigned many sons to the tomb or followed the biers which bore their bodies to the grave, I too must be accounted unhappy, for my pupils who have died were not only many but good. Some I have buried myself, others, students from abroad, I have sent back to their homes in their coffins.[21]

Libanius' relationship was evidently close enough with some of his disciples that he was the one that buried them – a responsibility generally reserved for family.

Plotinus also acts as a father figure with regards to Porphryry – not in burying him but in convincing him not to take his own life so that he wouldn't have to:

> He [Plotinus] once noticed that I, Porphyry, was thinking of removing myself from this life. He came to me unexpectedly while I was staying indoors in my house and told me that this lust for death did not come from a settled rational decision but from a bilious indisposition, and urged me to go away for a holiday.[22]

The fact that Plotinus knew Porphyry well enough to *infer* that he was thinking about suicide is quite significant, and implies a relationship based on more than just professional matters; being able to sense someone's else's depression, especially in antiquity before it was well understood, would have required that Plotinus know Porphyry on a deeply personal level.

Finally, Jesus is presented in the gospels as compassionate and caring towards those to whom he was sent to minister. All throughout his ministry, Jesus healed the sick and the lame, and showed kindness to those groups in society universally looked down upon, such as prostitutes and tax collectors. An image used to characterize his relationship to his disciples was that of the shepherd and his sheep: Mark 6:34, a few verses before the feeding of the 5000, states

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[21] A.F. Norman, *Libanius: Autobiography and Selected Letters*, 219.
[22] A. H. Armstrong, *Porphyry on Plotinus*, 37.

that when Jesus saw the crowd "he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things." This idea of Jesus as the shepherd of his disciples is developed further in John 10, wherein Jesus says "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."[23] The power gap in this metaphor is even wider than that presented in the father/son metaphor, for sheep are absolutely helpless on their own, and depend upon the shepherd for their very survival. However, this metaphor is like the father/son metaphor in that it maintains the idea of the teacher caring deeply for his disciples: just like a father protects his children with his life, so too will a shepherd protect his sheep.

VII: On Disciples' Dedication to Their Teachers

For all the care that teachers had for their disciples, one might expected a good level of reciprocity in the behavior of disciples. However, the biographies are consistent in presenting disciples as generally unwilling to support their teachers when negative consequences are involved; as soon as the going got tough, many disciples abandoned their teachers.

The most striking example of this phenomenon occurs in the events leading up to Jesus' crucifixion. In Matthew 26:35, Peter makes – and the other disciples affirm – the following statement: "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." Yet in the verses immediately following, when Jesus is praying in Gethsemane, none of the disciples were able to stay awake to keep watch. When he was subsequently arrested, Matthew states that "all the disciples deserted him and fled."[24] For all their statements of devotion, the disciples proved rather unwilling to die with their teacher after all.

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[23] John 10:11
[24] Matthew 26:56

A parallel situation can be found in book 4 of Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*. When Apollonius and his disciples are stopped on the road to Rome by Philolaus, a philosopher fleeing Rome because of Nero's persecution of philosophers, a test arises for Apollonius' followers: heed the panicked warnings of Philolaus and abandon Apollonius and philosophy, or continue on to Rome and Nero. Most of Apollonius so-called disciples decide to abandon him:

> Immediately those of them who were irresolute were shown up. Dismayed by Philolaus's words, some pleaded illness, others lack of provisions, others homesickness, others terrifying dreams, until Apollonius was reduced from thirty-four disciples to eight, who followed him to Rome, while the others ran as fast as they could away from Nero and philosophy.[25]

Rather than pouring scorn on those that abandoned him, Apollonius praised the dedication of those men that remained – less than a quarter of the number he originally had accompanying him.

Plotinus also experienced a form of abandonment, but not for the same reasons as Jesus and Apollonius. Towards the end of his life Plotinus contracted a disease of the bowels, but refused to submit to an enema, "saying that it was unsuitable for an elderly man to undergo this sort of treatment."[26] He also refused to take medicines containing the flesh of wild beasts "giving as his reason that he did not approve of eating the flesh even of domestic animals."[27] As his condition deteriorated, he was abandoned by his disciples "because he had the habit of greeting everyone by word of mouth."[28] Consequently, Plotinus spent the time leading up his death mostly alone, despite all that he had done for others over the course of his life.[29]

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[25] Christopher P. Jones, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana: Books I-IV*, 399.
[26] A. H. Armstrong, *Porphyry on Plotinus*, 5.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Porphyry excuses himself by claiming that he was on the vacation that Plotinus proscribed for his suicidal thoughts, and only came to learn of this situation after Plotinus had already died.

VIII: On Disciples Organizing Their Teachers' Legacies

More than any other aspect of the relationship, it is the disciples' control over their teachers' legacies that defines their status as independent, autonomous agents. For Porphyry, Damis, and the Apostles of Jesus Christ, the recording and organization of their masters' teaching fundamentally changed the way they interacted with their teachers – before their death to an extent, but especially after. Libanius, in writing his own autobiography, was effectively in control of his own legacy, and thus provides a good point of comparison for what biography might have been like were disciples' individual interests removed from the equation. (Though the better part of Libanius' autobiography was initially composed as an oration, so it has its own set of biases).

Philostratus presents Damis' relationship with Apollonius almost entirely through his task of recording Apollonius words and actions. When he is first introduced by Philostratus, this is what gets said of him: "There was a certain Damis, not devoid of wisdom, who once lived in Old Ninos. This man became a disciple of Apollonius and wrote up not only his journeys, on which he claims to have been his companion, but also his sayings, speeches, and predictions."[30] Most of what Philostratus based his writing on comes from Damis' account of Apollonius journey's, but evidently these were not the only things Damis kept record of.

Similar observations are made of him when he is first introduced into the narrative of Apollonius' life in 1.19:

> The Assyrian's [i.e., Damis'] Greek was mediocre, for he lacked elegance of style, having been educated among barbarians. Yet he was very well able to record a discourse or a conversation, describing what he had heard or seen, and making an account of such experiences … Damis' *Scrap Book* was composed for this purpose, that he wished nothing about Apollonius to go unknown.[31]

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[30] Christopher P. Jones, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana: Books I-IV*, 39.
[31] Ibid., 77.

Practically speaking, Damis' relationship with Apollonius was based upon this *Scrap Book* of his; by following Apollonius around, Damis learned, but also recorded. He was so persistent, in fact, that Apollonius sent him to Nerva in 8.28 so that he could die without Damis being there to record it.

Porphyry describes himself in somewhat similar terms, but rather than recording everything that Plotinus said, Porphyry compiled it. Such compilation was necessary, as Porphyry explains, because

> When Plotinus had written anything he could never bear to go over it twice; even to read it through once was too much for him, as his eyesight did not serve him well for reading. In writing he did not divide his letters with any regard to appearance or divide his syllables correctly, and he paid no attention to spelling.[32]

Aside from dealing with these things, Porphyry also set himself about organizing all of Plotinus writings. In so doing, Porphyry somewhat arbitrarily divided Plotinus's treatises into six sets of nine – the so-called Enneads – and organized them as he saw fit. Essentially, after Plotinus' death, Porphyry took over his teaching and legacy; his relationship with Plotinus changed from one of disciple and friend to public relations manager, as it were – both for Plotinus and his reputation, but also for himself.

The Apostles of Jesus had a similar role in taking over Jesus' teaching and reputation after his death. However, there was a division of labor among them (and their associates: Luke the physician, who wrote under the authority of Paul, and Mark, who wrote under the authority of Peter): while all the gospels cover Jesus' life and teaching, they go about doing it in slightly different ways. Matthew's gospel was primarily targeted at a Jewish audience, and thus contains more Hebraisms and allusions to Old Testament prophecy than the other gospels. Mark's gospel

[32] A. H. Armstrong, *Porphyry on Plotinus*, 29.

was primarily written for the gentiles, and is focused on aspects of Jesus' life and ministry that correspond to the theme of Jesus coming to save sinners. Luke is very empirical in his gospel – in much the same way Thucydides is in his *History of the Peloponnesian War* – and has more parables than the other synoptics. John's gospel is the most theologically dense of the four, containing many teachings of Jesus (the vine and the branches in John 15, e.g.) not found in the other three. In this way, none of the Apostles took full control of Jesus' legacy, but they all played a part in continuing his work in the world.

The biographies discussed in this section so far – the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, the *Life of Plotinus*, and the gospels – were all written or heavily influenced by disciples of the teachers that are the subjects. For this reason, it is unsurprising that they contain a proportionally large amount of material focused on themselves and other disciples – regarding their (own) actions and contributions to their teachers' lives and works. It is for this reason that they have been pulled from more extensively than Libanius in earlier sections – they simply have more to say about disciples than he does because they themselves are disciples. Now, however, it will be useful to compare the biographies disciples had a hand in with Libanius' autobiography, which was not the product of his students, but himself.

Libanius' autobiography does not contain much about Libanius' disciples, their personalities, or their influence on him. Most of what it does contain is limited to their effect on him: when they die, he is sad; when they are successful, he is happy; etc. Instead, Libanius' autobiography focuses much more on Libanius himself – his career, his battles and friendships with governors of Antioch, his bouts of disease and melancholy. This is not surprising; in fact, it makes perfect sense for his autobiography to focus upon himself. What *is* surprising is the extent that this makes his autobiography different from the biographies previously discussed – while

these biographies obviously do talk about their subjects, the amount of material on other things (like the personalities of their disciples and interactions with them) is quite significant when compared to the relative focus of Libanius' writing.

It is difficult to say for sure why this disparity exists. Perhaps disciples felt they had something to gain by inserting themselves into the lives of teachers. Perhaps they simply included more information about their own lives or experiences because that is what they knew and felt most comfortable talking about. Whatever the reason, its existence makes it clear that disciples *did* significantly influence how the biographies of their teachers were written. This observation, in turn, brings us full circle: because disciples played an active role in the propagation of their teacher's legacy by influencing the writing of their biographies, they were not merely passive listeners.

IX: Discussion

This paper has examined four ancient biographical sources to get an overview of some of the characteristics of the relationship between disciples and teachers in antiquity, and to show that disciples played active rather than passive roles in the lives and legacies of their teachers.

In addition to the relationships they had with teachers, disciples commonly had relationships with other disciples. For example, Porphyry takes great pains in his *Life of Plotinus* to paint himself favorably in comparison to Amelius; Jesus' disciples, in Mark 9:33ff., argue about who is the greatest among them; etc. This jockeying between disciples shows that there was probably a degree of competition for the attention of teachers.

It is also worth pointing out that the nature of "disciples" are inherently different across the fields of religion, philosophy, and rhetoric. The term was used generally in this paper to compare the students of teachers of all three disciplines, but in a more detailed study of one sub-

group, it would be worth delineating specific characteristics to a higher degree. One might note, for example, that students of sophists like Libanius commonly went on to become sophists or teachers themselves (eventually moving on from their teacher), while disciples of philosophers very commonly remained disciples until the death of their teacher. Other distinctions could easily be made, and should be made in the case of a more focused study.

Finally, the comparisons done between these four biographies should in no way be taken as representative of the relationships between disciples and teachers in all of biography as a genre; that is to say, depending on place and time, other biographies might not conform to the patterns observed above. The purpose of this work was to start an examination of the relationship of disciples and teachers in ancient biography, not to come up with a unifying theory to explain the topic across all circumstances.

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All quoted scripture comes from the 2011 English Standard Version.