

The Emperor Julian and Cyril of Alexandria on Human Nature, Ethnicity, and Moral Progress

Matthew R. CRAWFORD
Australian Catholic University

I. INTRODUCTION

In present discourse the concept of human nature is highly contested but also seemingly a notion we cannot easily dispense with. One common contemporary reaction is to critique it as an oppressive concept on the grounds that it necessarily entails normative judgments about what constitutes a human person, which can then be used as justification for declaring some persons to be not fully human due to their failure to instantiate what is taken to be expected human traits or behavior. Moreover, normative notions of human nature have the potential of being operationalized as programs intended to transform those who are deemed sub-human into fully human persons, which might seem to the targets of such improvement programs as oppressive, even if those enacting it have the best of intentions. Nevertheless, the concept remains potent as a sort of dark matter often operating in the background even among those who might find it regressive and oppressive. For example, someone who feels that their humanity or the humanity of a certain person or group has been denied is likely to take offense and the assertion of one's humanity can function as a powerful form of protest¹. But to do so assumes that the abstract category

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1. To take just one example that illustrates this point, in 1968 African-American sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee went on strike after the death of two employees. The protesters carried signs with the simple message "I am a man". To support the striking workers,

of “humanity” has some intelligible content that is taken as shared by the two parties in question, and an abstract category of “humanity” is very close to what would traditionally have been understood to be “human nature”. One tempting way out of this conundrum is to posit that there is no single human nature but rather various natures that one can observe among the human species, and even to allow everyone to define for themselves what it means to be “human”. Indeed, we often in casual discourse use the term loosely in this sort of manner, referring to someone as having a “violent nature” or being “good-natured”, intending with such remarks not to make claims about the entire species *Homo sapiens* but about the specific individual before us. It is not clear, however, how this casual usage of “nature” language to refer to the traits of an individual should be related to the sense shared by the majority of modern persons that we have an obligation to all fellow members of our species to recognize them as possessing “humanity”, an abstract category that seems unavoidably entangled with some definition of what constitutes the human. And at this point we are back where we began, with the specter of an oppressive metaphysical abstraction that can be used to deny the humanity of those who fail to exhibit all of the traits or behaviors denoted by it.

Solving this conundrum that our present moment in history has rendered so acute is beyond the scope of the present article. Nonetheless, our understanding of the alluring potency of the concept of “human nature” can be enhanced by considering the way that it has been deployed in other times and places, within distinct traditions of rationality. To that end, the aim of this study is to consider the role played by ethnicity in the accounts of human nature set forth by the Roman emperor Julian and his later Christian antagonist Cyril, bishop of Alexandria. Scholars have been investigating notions of ethnicity in antiquity for some time now with increasing sophistication and insight. Nonetheless, the passages discussed in the pages that follow have scarcely been noticed in this growing body of literature, despite the fact that they represent one of the most complex ancient accounts of the origins of human diversity, juxtaposed with one of the most strident assertions of human equality, and present multiple points of resonance with contemporary concerns².

Martin Luther King, Jr. travelled to Memphis where he was assassinated. See https://www.doi.gov/general/aboutdoi/hallofhonor/2011_memphis [accessed on 31 January 2024].

2. For example, the passages from *Against the Galileans* and *Against Julian* that are the focus of the present study are not mentioned in B.H. ISAAC, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2004; D. KIMBER BUELL, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2005; M. ELIAV-FELDON – B.H. ISAAC – J. ZIEGLER (eds.), *The Origins of Racism in the West*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009; K. VLASSOPOULOS, *Greeks and Barbarians*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013; J. MCINERNEY (ed.), *A Companion to Ethnicity in the Ancient Mediterranean*, Oxford, Wiley Blackwell, 2014; T.S. BERZON, *Classifying Christians: Ethnography, Heresiology, and the Limits of Knowledge in Late Antiquity*, Oakland, CA, University of California Press, 2016; E.S. GRUEN, *Ethnicity in the*

The reason for bringing together these two figures is not just that they are two of the most prominent and influential spokespersons for the wider movements of Neoplatonism and late antique Christianity but because their legacies are entangled in a complex text containing a fascinating literary debate. In the winter of 362/363 prior to his fateful Persian campaign, Julian composed a three-book treatise known as *Against the Galileans* in which he aimed to set forth for his readers his reasons for abandoning the Christian faith of his childhood and returning to the worship of the traditional Greco-Roman deities³. Julian's polemical tract is mostly lost but extensive extracts were preserved when Cyril, sixty years later, composed an apologetic response that relied upon lengthy verbatim quotations followed by a point-by-point rebuttal of the emperor's arguments⁴. *Against*

Ancient World – Did It Matter?, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2020. The fourth- and fifth-century dates of these texts from Julian and Cyril admittedly fall outside the chronological span of some of these studies, so it is not surprising that they have been comparatively neglected, though, as we will see, these two authors carry forward themes that had been the topic of extensive theorization and debate over the preceding centuries.

3. As he himself says in the opening lines of the work: Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 1. The most recent critical edition of Julian's treatise is E. MASARACCHIA, *Giuliano Imperatore, Contra Galilaeos: Introduzione, testo critico e traduzione*, Roma, Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1990. Further fragments of the work have come to light since Masaracchia's publication. For a survey of these, see M.R. CRAWFORD, *Towards a New Edition of Julian's Contra Galilaeos: Assessing the Material from the Syriac Transmission of Cyril's Contra Iulianum*, in *Classical Quarterly* 72 (2023) 850-867. Masaracchia's Greek text was republished with an accompanying French translation in A. GIAVATTO – R. MULLER, *Julien l'Empereur. Contre les Galiléens*, Paris, Vrin, 2018. The most recent English translation is now a century old, based on Neumann's 1880 critical edition: W.C. WRIGHT, *Against the Galileans*, in *The Works of the Emperor Julian, Volume 3* (Loeb Classical Library, 157), Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1923, 311-427. Ancient references to the treatise are exceedingly scarce. The dating of its composition is based upon a passing reference in Libanius' funeral oration for the emperor (*Or.* 18.178).

4. Cyril's *Against Julian* was included with the rest of his corpus in the seventeenth-century collection of his works published by Jean Aubert but the first complete critical edition only appeared very recently: C. RIEDWEG – W. KINZIG (eds.), *Kyrill von Alexandrien I: Gegen Julian*. Teil 1: *Buch 1-5* (GCS NF, 20), Berlin, De Gruyter, 2016; W. KINZIG – T. BRÜGGEMANN (eds.), *Kyrill von Alexandrien I: Gegen Julian*. Teil 2: *Buch 6-10 und Fragmente* (GCS NF, 21), Berlin, De Gruyter, 2017. An edition of the text for the Sources chrétiennes series is also underway: P. BURGUIÈRE – P. ÉVIEUX (eds.), *Cyrille d'Alexandrie: Contre Julien*. Tome I: *Livres I et II* (SC, 322), Paris, Cerf, 1985; M.-O. BOULNOIS (ed.), *Cyrille d'Alexandrie: Contre Julien*. Tome II: *Livres III-V* (SC, 583), Paris, Cerf, 2016; EAD. (ed.), *Cyrille d'Alexandrie: Contre Julien*. Tome IV: *Livres VIII-IX* (SC, 624), Paris, Cerf, 2021. A German translation appeared last year: G. HUBER-REBENICH – S. REBENICH – M. SCHRAMM, *Kyrill von Alexandrien. Gegen Julian. Bd. 1* (Bibliothek der griechischen Literatur, 94.1), Stuttgart, Hiersemann, 2023; A.M. RITTER – M. SCHRAMM – T. BRÜGGEMANN, *Kyrill von Alexandrien. Gegen Julian. Bd. 2* (Bibliothek der griechischen Literatur, 94.2), Stuttgart, Hiersemann, 2023. Finally, an English translation should be published next year: M.R. CRAWFORD – A.P. JOHNSON – E. JEREMIAH, *Cyril of Alexandria: Against Julian*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, forthcoming. A spate of recent studies of Cyril's *Against Julian* has appeared in the past few years, too many to list here, though a good place to start is the collected essays in G. HUBER-REBENICH – S. REBENICH (eds.), *Interreligiöse*

the Galileans is largely aimed at highlighting passages from the Christian scriptures and undermining the Christian interpretation of them⁵. One biblical notion that Julian found particularly odious was the special status the Hebrew scriptures accorded to the nation of Israel⁶. The sort of ethnic chauvinism he detected in this claim prompted him to set forth a lengthy exposition of what can only be described as a philosophy of ethnicity that accounts for the variation within the human species in the domains of nations, bodies, laws, customs, morals, and intellectual achievement⁷. In fact, Jean Bouffartigue has gone as far as to claim that Julian's development of a "truly ethnological doctrine" ("une doctrine réellement ethnologique") in these passages represents his primary contribution to ancient philosophy⁸. The most distinctive aspect of Julian's account was his attempt

Konflikte im 4. und 5. Jahrhundert: Julian "Contra Galilaeos" – Kyrill "Contra Iulianum" (TU, 181), Berlin, De Gruyter, 2020. At present the only monographic study is W.J. MALLEY, *Hellenism and Christianity: The Conflict between Hellenic and Christian Wisdom in the "Contra Galilaeos" of Julian the Apostate and the "Contra Iulianum" of St. Cyril of Alexandria* (Analecta Gregoriana, 210), Roma, Università Gregoriana, 1978.

5. The focus of Julian's treatise upon attacking the Christian scriptures was noted by Libanius, *Or.* 18.178 and also highlighted by Cyril as the reason it was unsettling even those Christians who were well grounded in their faith (*c. Iul. prosp.*4). Julian's tactic, however, was not a straightforward dismissal of Christianity's authoritative texts but a sophisticated attempt to coopt at least some of them into his own Hellenic master narrative, as argued in B. BOSWELL, *Moses the Hellenic Sage: Re-Reading Julian's Against the Galileans*, in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 30 (2022) 245-274. Boswell's argument will be laid out at greater length in his monograph *Emperor Julian, Cyril of Alexandria, and the Narrative Conflict of Traditions*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, forthcoming. For an overview of Julian's argument in *Against the Galileans*, see especially C. RIEDWEG, *Anti-Christian Polemics and Pagan Onto-Theology: Julian's Against the Galileans*, in S. REBENICH – H.-U. WIEMER (eds.), *A Companion to Julian the Apostate* (Brill's Companions to the Byzantine World, 5), Leiden, Brill, 2020, 245-266. Other treatments may be found in L. NICCOLAI, *Christianity, Philosophy, and Roman Power: Constantine, Julian, and the Bishops on Exegesis and Empire*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2023, pp. 146-55; T. NESSELRATH, *Kaiser Julian und die Repaganisierung des Reiches: Konzept und Vorbilder*, Münster, Aschendorff, 2013, pp. 50-55; S. ELM, *Sons of Hellenism, Fathers of the Church: Emperor Julian, Gregory of Nazianzus, and the Vision of Rome*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 2012, pp. 312-321; R. SMITH, *Julian's Gods: Religion and Philosophy in the Thought and Action of Julian the Apostate*, London, Routledge, 1995, pp. 189-207; P. ATHANASSIADI, *Julian: An Intellectual Biography*, New York, Routledge, 1992, pp. 161-169.

6. See Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 20.

7. Cf. A. FINKELSTEIN, *The Specter of the Jews: Emperor Julian and the Rhetoric of Ethnicity in Syrian Antioch*, Oakland, CA, University of California Press, 2018, p. 17: "As it was used by Julian and other ancient writers, the term *ethnos* included a geographical territory, perceived common blood, a shared history, and a common culture, including language and dress, but also a god and a central cult with attendant religious practices and theological doctrines".

8. J. BOUFFARTIGUE, *La diversité des nations et la nature des hommes: L'empereur Julien et Cyrille d'Alexandrie dans une controverse incertaine*, in S. CROGIEZ-PÉTREQUIN (ed.), *Dieu(x) et hommes: Histoire et iconographie des sociétés païennes et chrétiennes de l'Antiquité à nos jours. Mélanges en l'honneur de Françoise Thélamon*, Rouen, Université

to explain all of the aforementioned aspects of human diversity as resulting from a complex causal network comprising patron deities as well as the wider natural cosmos, which together produce the distinctive “natures” exhibited by various nations on earth.

One aim of the present study is, therefore, to bring greater attention to these passages from Julian which have been largely overlooked⁹. A second aim is to elucidate the theological account of human equality based upon a common human nature that Julian’s attack evoked from Cyril¹⁰, since it has received even less discussion in the literature on this topic¹¹ and since doing so throws into sharper relief what was at stake in this late antique debate. More specifically, setting the positions of Julian and Cyril side-by-side demonstrates that they are each advocating for a kind of universalism, that is, a view that makes grand claims about the origin of the entire human species and the inherent capabilities and obligations of specific

de Rouen, 2005, 113-126, p. 114. See also the sections “Ethnographie” and “Anthropologie” in J. BOUFFARTIGUE, *L’empereur Julien et la culture de son temps*, Paris, Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 1992, pp. 464-469.

9. Prior to Bouffartigue’s aforementioned study, an overview of the passages was provided by C. RIEDWEG, *With Stoicism and Platonism against the Christians: Structures of Philosophical Argumentation in Julian’s Contra Galilaeos*, in *Hermathena* 166 (1999) 79-84. See also the subsequent studies of M.-O. BOULNOIS, *La diversité des nations et l’élection d’Israël: Y a-t-il une influence du Contre Celse d’Origène sur le Contre les Galiléens de Julien?*, in S. KACZMAREK – H. PIETRAS – A. DZIADOWIEC (eds.), *Origeniana Decima: Origen as a Writer (Papers of the 10th International Origen Congress)* (BETL, 244), Leuven – Paris – Walpole, MA, Peeters, 2011, 803-830; J. HILTON, *Nomos, Physis, and Ethnicity in the Emperor Julian’s Interpretation of the Tower of Babel Story*, in *Classical World* 111 (2018) 525-547. Julian’s view of one specific ethnic group, the Jews, has recently received a lengthy treatment in FINKELSTEIN, *The Specter of the Jews* (n. 7), who takes note of the studies of Bouffartigue and Boulnois. However, he mentions his philosophy of ethnic diversity only in passing (pp. 59-60) and, in my judgment, misreads Julian’s account on several important points that will be highlighted in what follows. The relevant passages are not discussed in NICCOLAI, *Christianity, Philosophy, and Roman Power* (n. 5), and receive only brief mention in ELM, *Sons of Hellenism* (n. 5), pp. 314-315.

10. I have termed Cyril’s position in this literary debate a *theological* account in contrast to Julian’s philosophy of ethnicity, not to draw a sharp contrast between theology and philosophy, but because Cyril himself typically avoids using φιλοσοφία and its cognates to describe his own intellectual activity and, when such words do appear in his writings, they are usually marked as outsider discourse. See further M.R. CRAWFORD, *Cyril of Alexandria’s Contra Iulianum, Imperial Politics, and Alexandrian Philosophy (c. 416-428)*, in E. ANAGNOSTOU-LAOUTIDES – K. PARRY (eds.), *Eastern Christianity and Late Antique Philosophy* (Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity, 18), Leiden, Brill, 2020, 110-132. He nonetheless did appropriate some strands of the Greek philosophical tradition, particularly for the explication of his Christology (see R.M. SIDDALS, *Logic and Christology in Cyril of Alexandria*, in *Journal of Theological Studies* 38 [1987] 341-367), and argued in *c. Iul.* for a limited concurrence between it and Christianity (see especially M.-O. BOULNOIS, *Cyril of Alexandria Reading Porphyry*, in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 28 [2020] 443-465).

11. See BOUFFARTIGUE, *La diversité des nations* (n. 8), pp. 121-126; BOULNOIS, *La diversité des nations* (n. 9), pp. 827-829. Bouffartigue’s main aim in this section is to refute the criticisms Cyril brings against Julian’s account rather than explore his alternate proposal on its own terms.

persons and groups of people. However, their universalisms diverge not only in terms of their contrasting views of specific aspects of human identity but also in terms of which aspects of human identity are even included in the universalism each is advocating. Most significantly, ethnicity is the dominant defining category for Julian's universalism, while Cyril excludes it from having any relevance for defining human nature.

Before, however, turning to the emperor and the bishop, it will be helpful to introduce another voice into this conversation which serves as a backdrop for our two main interlocutors. Recent research by Marie-Odile Boulnois has all but established that Julian's *Against the Galileans* was responding, at least at times, directly to Origen's *Against Celsus* and this is likely to be true specifically with respect to the current topic¹². Julian presents his account of providential diversity in contrast to a Christian interpretation of the Tower of Babel and probably has in mind the earlier Alexandrian master who had discussed this episode in book five of his apology, interpreting it as a myth describing the embodiment of souls¹³.

12. See M.-O. BOULNOIS, *The Biblical Text and Its Variants at the Heart of the Debate between the Emperor Julian and Cyril of Alexandria: The Cases of Genesis 6, 2 and 49, 10*, in *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 25 (2021) 284-319; EAD., *Le Contre les Galiléens de l'empereur Julien répond-il au Contre Celse d'Origène?*, in E. AMATO (ed.), *Ἐν καλοῖς κοινοπραγία: Hommages à la mémoire de Pierre-Louis Malosse et Jean Bouffartigue*, Nantes, Association Textes pour l'histoire de l'Antiquité tardive, 2014, 103-128; BOULNOIS, *La diversité des nations* (n. 9). Boulnois' arguments are also endorsed in FINKELSTEIN, *The Specter of the Jews* (n. 7), p. 49. Bouffartigue had previously suggested that Julian's critique of the particularity of the Hebrew scriptures was inspired by the earlier attack on Christianity by Celsus (BOUFFARTIGUE, *La diversité des nations* [n. 8], p. 114). Julian's dependence upon Celsus is also accepted by HILTON, *Nomos, Physis, and Ethnicity* (n. 9), p. 531.

13. See especially Origen, *Cels.* 5.25-32, as well as his earlier comments on the topic of diversity among creatures at *Princ.* 1.8; 2.9; 3.1.23. It seems that within a year or two of writing *Against Celsus*, Origen had changed his mind on this question. In the newly discovered psalms homilies, he refers to his earlier view that the division of the nations occurred at the Tower of Babel and said he now thought it took place when Israel left Egypt (*Homily 8 on Psalm 77* §1). Cf. L. PERRONE *et al.*, *Origenes Werke 13: Die neuen Psalmenhomilien. Eine kritische Edition des Codex Monacensis Graecus 314* (GCS NF, 19), Berlin, De Gruyter, 2015, pp. 24-25. On Origen's treatment of the Babel episode, see especially P.W. MARTENS, *On the Confusion of Tongues and Origen's Allegory of the Dispersion of Nations*, in *The Studia Philonica Annual* 24 (2012) 107-127; A.P. JOHNSON, *Ethnicity: Greeks, Jews, and Christians*, in MCINERNEY (ed.), *A Companion to Ethnicity in the Ancient Mediterranean* (n. 2), 376-389, pp. 383-384. On early Christian engagement with the Babel story more broadly, see most recently Y. MINETS, *The Slow Fall of Babel: Languages and Identities in Late Antique Christianity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021, chapter 3; EAD., *The Tower of Babel and Language Corruption: Approaching Linguistic Disasters in Late Antiquity*, in *Studies in Late Antiquity* 6 (2022) 482-518. Minets summarizes Origen's treatment of Babel on pp. 122-124 of her monograph. In her *SLA* article, she briefly discusses Cyril's interpretation of Babel in his *Glaphyra* on p. 492. In her book she similarly mentions the same passage from the *Glaphyra* on p. 164 and includes a passing reference to *c. Iul.* book 7 on p. 147, following R. VAN ROOY, *Πόθεν ὄν ἡ τοσαύτη διαφωνία? Greek Patristic Authors Discussing Linguistic Origin, Diversity, Change and Kinship*, in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft* 23 (2013) 21-54, p. 34. Julian does not appear in either of Minets' studies.

The reason for highlighting Origen at this juncture is that both Julian and Cyril pick up different aspects of his influential account of ethnicity and human nature. Origen's view on this topic has been explicated most recently in a 2020 article by Matthijs den Dulk, whose interpretation I follow here¹⁴. The Alexandrian master was deeply worried by the problematic inequality between humans and nations that he observed in the world and rejected the view that this state of affairs was due to the existence of diverse "natures" amongst human souls, a notion he attributed to the followers of Marcion, Valentinus, and Basilides¹⁵. In response to such claims, Origen insisted upon the fundamental equality of all souls before God and offered a theodicy that explained the apparent inequity among ethnic groups by appealing to pre-embodied choices made by each soul. Thanks to these pre-embodied choices, each soul received precisely the set of circumstances in life it merited, including the particular nation to which it belonged, with each nation being governed by a distinct angelic being responsible for leading it to a more virtuous state. In short, in Origen's theory "the cause of the diversity and variety among each of the creatures was shown to derive from their own impulses" (*causa diuersitatis ac uarietatis in singulis quibusque creaturis ostenditur ex ipsarum motibus*)¹⁶. Consequently, differences amongst humans were not due to "accidence or chance"¹⁷ but nor were they due to inequitable treatment by God or the existence of diverse "natures" made by a multiplicity of creators.

Nevertheless, as den Dulk argues, even though Origen's account arises from a deep unease at the inequality that exists between ethnicities and insists that all humans are created by the same God and are in this sense equal, "on a number of key points precursors to modern racist discourses can be identified" in his theory of ethnicity, specifically the assumptions that there is a hierarchy of ethnicities and that this hierarchy is intertwined with geographic location¹⁸. If so, then one task for the present study will be to consider the degree to which similar tendencies appear in the contrasting views

14. M. DEN DULK, *Origen of Alexandria and the History of Racism as a Theological Problem*, in *Journal of Theological Studies* 71 (2020) 164-195. See now the response to den Dulk in J. SOLHEID, *Origen of Alexandria and Human Dignity*, in *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 27 (2023) 226-256. Den Dulk is currently preparing a rejoinder to Solheid's critique that should appear later in 2024. While Solheid helpfully draws attention to the theme of human dignity present in Origen's writings, his article does not seem to me to undermine den Dulk's argument that certain aspects of Origen's reasoning on ethnicity present precursors to later racist thinking.

15. Origen, *Princ.* 2.9.5. I follow the edition and translation of J. BEHR, *Origen: On First Principles*, 2 vols. (Oxford Early Christian Texts), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017. Origen also describes this theory of a "diversity of spiritual natures" at *Princ.* 1.8.1-2.

16. Origen, *Princ.* 1.8.2 (BEHR, 134-135, translation slightly modified).

17. Origen mentions "accidence and chance" in relation to differences among angels at *Princ.* 1.8.1 and differences among humans at *Princ.* 2.9.5.

18. DEN DULK, *Origen of Alexandria and the History of Racism* (n. 14), p. 195. See especially his four-point summary on p. 172.

of human nature evident in these two later authors. The applicability of modern terms like “racism” to the ancient world continues to be debated and of course inevitably hinges upon how one defines the concept¹⁹. For the purpose of the present study, I will focus on two more precise questions: first, the degree to which a given account of ethnicity assumes or justifies a hierarchy of ethnic groups; and, second, the degree to which an account of ethnicity is deterministic, in the sense of being an irresistible constraint upon a person’s characteristics and capabilities. As we will see, Julian and Cyril offer very different answers to these two questions.

II. JULIAN ON ETHNICITY AND HUMAN NATURE

Julian’s philosophy of human diversity is found primarily in fragments 21-28 of *Against the Galileans*, which are quoted in book four of Cyril’s apologetic response. His dominant concern in these passages is to defend divine providence against the view that the “difference among the nations” “came about spontaneously” (ἐκ τοῦ αὐτομάτου)²⁰ or “at random” (εἰκῆ)²¹, which he takes to be the entailment of the Christian view that God selected Israel as his special allotment and neglected all the other nations on earth²². Although the exact target of his polemic in this section

19. Den Dulk relies upon the work of ISAAC, *The Invention of Racism* (n. 2), who defined “racism” as “an attitude towards individuals and groups of peoples which posits a direct and linear connection between physical and mental qualities. It therefore attributes to those individuals and groups of peoples collective traits, physical, mental, and moral, which are constant and unalterable by human will, because they are caused by hereditary factors or external influences, such as climate or geography” (p. 23). Compare with the dissenting view of GRUEN, *Ethnicity in the Ancient World* (n. 2), p. 87: “In assessing others and passing judgment on their actions – which Roman [sic] regularly did – they very rarely applied ethnic criteria. Phrases like racism or ‘proto-racism’ miss the mark”. On the problem of the anachronism of the label, see also D. KIMBER BUELL, *Early Christian Universalism and Modern Forms of Racism*, in ELIAV-FELDON – ISAAC – ZIEGLER (eds.), *The Origins of Racism in the West* (n. 2), 109-131, pp. 129-131. Den Dulk attempts to sidestep the “definitional quandaries” by merely looking for “precursors” to later racist thought in Origen (p. 168), and I follow his approach here.

20. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 21.26, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.2.30. All references to *Against the Galileans* are to the fragment and line number of Masaracchia’s edition (n. 3) and all references to Cyril’s *Against Julian* are to the book, paragraph, and line numbers of the two-volume GCS edition (n. 4). Translations are my own and are adaptations of the forthcoming translation of *Against Julian* prepared by myself, Aaron Johnson, and Ed Jeremiah.

21. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 26.19, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.40.23.

22. Julian’s explanation of human diversity in terms of divine providence sets him in opposition to the view of Strabo (2.3.7) who said the geographical distribution of plants and animals “is not the result of providence but is rather due to accident and chance, just like ethnic differences and languages” (αἱ γὰρ τοιαῦτα διατάξεις οὐκ ἐκ προνοίας γίνονται, καθάπερ οὐδὲ αἱ κατὰ τὰ ἔθνη διαφοραί, οὐδ’ αἱ διάλεκτοι, ἀλλὰ κατὰ περίπτωσιν καὶ συντυχίαν). Strabo was here rejecting the earlier view of the Stoic Posidonius who, like Julian, attributed such aspects of the world to providential design. Cf. RIEDWEG, *With Stoicism and*

is not always clear, the latter word is mentioned in reference to the confusion of languages at Babel, so at some level Julian throughout these fragments is contending with a view that would explain human diversity by appealing to that famous passage from Genesis. Perhaps, as noted previously, he has in mind Origen's comments in *Against Celsus* but, regardless of Julian's precise target, it is clear that he views spontaneity and divine fiat as incompatible with providence; in contrast, a philosophically satisfying account of the providential ordering of the world should be able to explain the "causes" (αἰτίαι) for the obvious differences within the human species²³. The importance of this word for Julian is signaled by its repetition three times in the opening fragment of this section of *Against the Galileans*, echoing Origen's prior attempt to explain the providential cause of diversity in *Princ.* 1.8.2.

Julian's criticism of Genesis is, however, carefully calibrated and does not amount to a complete dismissal of the story of Babel. Rather, he concedes that "Moses has overall given a mythical cause (αἰτίαν ... μυθώδη)" for the diversity of languages and Julian's designation of the story as "myth" is not derogatory but rather indicates that it possesses an important hidden meaning, like other myths²⁴. However, the only aspect of truth

Platonism (n. 9), p. 81, n. 99; BOUFFARTIGUE, *La diversité des nations* (n. 8), p. 116, n. 13; BOULNOIS, *La diversité des nations* (n. 9), p. 823. On Neoplatonic views of providence, see the overviews in M. DRAGONA-MONACHOU, *Divine Providence in the Philosophy of the Empire*, in ANRW II.36.7 (1994) 4417-4490 and P. ADAMSON, *Freedom, Providence and Fate*, in P. REMES – S. SLAVENA-GRIFFIN (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism*, New York, Routledge, 2014, 437-452. The handbook of Neoplatonic theology written by Julian's contemporary Sallustius similarly states that "providence and fate exist for nations and cities" (Πρόνοια καὶ Εἰμαρμένη ἔστι μὲν περὶ ἔθνη καὶ πόλεις) (*De deis et mundo* 9.7) but does not expand on this idea. Julian also proclaims his adherence to divine providence at *ep.* 89b, 301a BIDEZ, on which see RIEDWEG, *With Stoicism and Platonism* (n. 9), p. 72.

23. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 21.20, 25, 27, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.2.24, 30, 32. Julian repeats the word αἰτία at *c. Gal.* fr. 23.4; 24.5, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.29.7; 4.33.2.

24. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 23.4-5, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.29.7. Scholarship is divided over whether or not Julian regarded the Mosaic writings as myths concealing a deeper philosophical truth, with the debate arising above all from an ambiguous relative clause at *c. Gal.* fr. 17.11-12, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 3.29.17. In addition to its excerpting by Cyril, the passage in question was also quoted by the fifth-century historian Socrates who understood it to be Julian's affirmation that the Mosaic writings were "mystical discourses containing a secret meaning" (*H.E.* 3.23.30-36). For the most recent analysis of this problem, see BOSWELL, *Moses the Hellenic Sage* (n. 5), pp. 256-264, with further literature cited there. In addition, see especially C. RIEDWEG, *Mythos mit geheimem Sinn oder reine Blasphemie? Julian über die mosaische Erzählung vom Sündenfall (Contra Galilaeos fr. 17,10-12 Masaracchia)*, in A. KOLDE – A. LUKINOVICH – A.-L. REY (eds.), Κορυφαίω ἀνδρῶν: *Mélanges offerts à André Hurst* (Recherches et rencontres, 22), Geneva, Droz, 2005, 367-375; M.-O. BOULNOIS, *Genèse 2-3: Mythe ou vérité? Un sujet de polémique entre païens et chrétiens dans le Contre Julien de Cyrille d'Alexandrie*, in *REAug* 54 (2008) 111-133. On Julian's view of myth more generally, see now NICCOLAI, *Christianity, Philosophy, and Roman Power* (n. 5), pp. 155-164. I follow Boswell's interpretation according to which Julian did regard the Mosaic writings as genuine myths amenable to an allegorical interpretation. If this reading

that he finds in the story, in our surviving fragments at least, is the use of the plural verb συγχέωμεν (“Let us confuse”) in Genesis 11,7 which he takes to refer to a plurality of divine beings²⁵. Moses, therefore, in Julian’s view, was well aware of the divine pantheon and had some intuition that it accounted for the diversity evident in the human species. However, Julian ultimately finds Moses’ myth of Babel to possess limited explanatory power since, as already noted, in his view it attributes such differences as language to mere divine fiat²⁶ and makes no mention of other differences among ethnic groups which he takes to be far more important than linguistic diversity²⁷.

To show the superiority of the Greek view of such matters, the emperor describes in some detail *how* the plurality of divine beings dimly glimpsed in Moses’ Babel myth accounts for the diversity evident among the various nations of the earth in the domains of “customs” (τὰ ἔθη) as well as “legal and civic institutions” (τὰ νόμιμα καὶ τὰ πολιτικά)²⁸. These gods take center stage in Julian’s theory and stand at the head of a complex descending chain of causation. The unnamed divine beings in Genesis he terms “gods who rule over nations and protect cities” (τῶν ἐθνῶν ἐθνάρχαις καὶ πολιούχοις θεοῖς), each of whom is assigned a distinct portion of humanity to oversee under the higher governance of the Demiurge over all²⁹. In a later fragment he adds that under each of these gods there is also “an angel, a daemon, and a separate race of souls” who “minister and assist” their presiding deity in governing their respective nation³⁰. The assigning of each nation to a distinct governing deity or other heavenly being was, of course, not unique to Julian. One can find similar notions expressed in Platonists like Celsus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus, and it is strikingly similar to Origen’s own interpretation of Babel as allegorically describing the fall of souls into various nations overseen by distinct angels³¹.

is correct, then, on this point Julian (knowingly?) interpreted the passage differently than that earlier critic of Christianity, Celsus, had (Origen, *Cels.* 4.21).

25. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 27, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.43.5-15.

26. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 26.18-27, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.40.23-31. The Genesis account does not explicitly record God “commanding ... that the languages should be confused and not agree with one another” as Julian claims, but it does attribute the resulting state of affairs directly to divine agency, which is presumably what he has in mind (Gen 11,7-8).

27. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 24, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.33.1-29.

28. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 24.9, 11, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.33.7, 9.

29. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 21.8-9, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.2.11-12. The term ἐθνάρχης does not appear elsewhere in Julian’s corpus but is used three times in the surviving fragments of *Against the Galileans*, with the other two occurrences being *c. Gal.* fr. 26.3; 28.5, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.40.4; 4.46.7. In contrast, πολιούχος does not otherwise occur in *Against the Galileans* but appears a handful of times in Julian’s wider corpus: *Ep.* 111 [p. 188.15-16 BIDEZ]; *ad Ath.* 8.280d; *Mis.* 28.357c; 33.360d; 39.366b.

30. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 26.3-5, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.40.5-6.

31. See Celsus, *apud* Origen, *Cels.* 5.25; 8.35; Porphyry, *Comm.Tim.* fr. 17.6-9 Sodano; Iamblichus, *Myst.* 5.24-25; Origen, *Cels.* 1.24; 3.35; 5.26-32, 46; 7.68, 70. Cf. Eusebius, *P.E.* 5.2.1; 7.16; *D.E.* 4.6.9-10.

Julian's version of this idea becomes, however, more innovative when he posits a correspondence between the characteristics of a given nation and its ruling deity. Thus, he says, "Ares governs the warlike nations", "Athena the nations that are warlike as well as prudent", and so on³². In short, "the nations themselves correspond to the essence of the particular god governing them" (καθ' ἑκάστην οὐσίαν τῶν οἰκειῶν θεῶν ἔπεται καὶ τὰ ἐπιτροπευόμενα παρὰ σφῶν ἔθνη)³³. One can find a partial precedent for this thesis in Celsus' claim that "the practices done by each [ethnic group] are done correctly when they are carried out in the way that is agreeable" to the divine being that oversees each of them³⁴. Celsus, therefore, like Julian, posited a correspondence between the behavior of an ethnic group and its presiding deity. Julian, however, casts this correspondence with a distinct directionality by presenting the "essence" of these deities as the "cause" of human diversity, making explicit something that was more ambiguous in Celsus' comments³⁵. Another precursor for Julian's theory is Plotinus, who noted in his treatment of providence that "things that change do not change at random ... but as is fitting for the divine powers to produce them, since all that is divine produces in accord with its own nature and its nature is in accord with its essence". The directionality of divine action rooted in divine essence that was ambiguous in Celsus' account is here present more clearly in Plotinus, though he had in mind simply the overall "beauty" (τὸ καλόν) of the universe produced by the gods and did not extend this principle to rationalize particular gods causing ethnic diversity in the way Julian does.

Julian gives little indication of how this correspondence between the character of an ethnic group and its deity arises, and in this fragment

32. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 21.12-14, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.2.15-17.

33. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 21.14-15, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.2.17-18. Literally, "according to each essence of the respective gods there follows also the nations governed by them".

34. Celsus, *apud* Origen, *Cels.* 5.25: Καὶ δὴ τὰ παρ' ἑκάστοις ὀρθῶς ἂν πράττειτο ταύτη δρόμενα, ὅπη ἐκείνοις φίλον· παραλύειν δὲ οὐχ ὅσιον εἶναι τὰ ἐξ ἀρχῆς κατὰ τόπους νενομισμένα. On this passage see DEN DULK, *Origin of Alexandria and the History of Racism* (n. 14), pp. 185-186.

35. I therefore think it is backwards to say, "According to Julian, the Demiurge has assigned each people a god fitting its nature" (FINKELSTEIN, *The Specter of the Jews* [n. 7], p. 60). The chain of causation seems to me to run in the opposite direction in Julian's account, as recognized by BOUFFARTIGUE, *La diversité des nations* (n. 8), p. 116; RIEDWEG, *With Stoicism and Platonism* (n. 9), p. 82; BOULNOIS, *La diversité des nations* (n. 9), p. 820. If one only had the opening paragraph of *c. Gal.* fr. 21 (*apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.2) which mentions the gods ruling over the nations, Finkelstein's reading would be possible. However, even in the midst of that paragraph he states that the nations "follow" the essence of their ruling deity, not the other way around. Moreover, immediately after this paragraph he asks his imagined Christian interlocutor to state the "causes" for the differences among the nations if he disagrees with Julian's account, presumably referring back to the gods mentioned in the previous paragraph. The gods are, therefore, central to Julian's account of the providential causation of human diversity and not merely a consequence of an already existing diversity.

merely states that each god “governs his own allotment in a manner appropriate to himself” (οἰκείως ἑαυτῷ), presumably referring to the interaction of the divine being with a given nation through its ancestral religious rites. Moreover, in another passage in one of his letters, he identifies these divine beings with the “younger gods” of the *Timaeus* who receive eternal souls from the Demiurge and join them to bodies to produce the “mortal races”. In this letter, Julian explicitly rejects the Mosaic account of all humanity originating from a single human pair and proposes instead that the nations of the earth came into being through the simultaneous but distinct creative agency of these younger gods who were each responsible for one nation³⁶. It would seem, therefore, that Julian thinks this creative act leaves an impression of the deity’s essence in the characteristics or disposition of its nation, which is also reflected in and sustained by the deity’s mode of governing that nation. This correspondence between the essence of a deity and the ethnic group dependent upon it begins to elucidate the fuller causal explanation for human diversity Julian believes is omitted from Moses’ Babel myth.

Though Julian employs flexible terminology to describe the feature of the nations that corresponds to its deity, the term that plays the most central role in these passages is φύσις or “nature”. He later uses the word φύσις in the plural to refer to that aspect of ethnic groups that is stable and resists change and seems, therefore, to think that different ethnicities have different natures rather than positing a single nature shared by all humans³⁷. Julian, however, is not interested merely in human nature in isolation but has in mind the entire natural cosmos, as becomes apparent in the later passages in which he elaborates upon his philosophy of human diversity by creatively appropriating a polemical argument first voiced two centuries earlier by the physician Galen. Galen had argued in passing that the divine *fiat* of the Genesis creation account was insufficient to explain why the world functions as it does since it ignores the complex systems and processes that operate in regular and harmonious fashion³⁸. More specifically, Galen

36. Julian, *ep.* 89b, 291d-292d BIDEZ. As highlighted also by BOUFFARTIGUE, *L'empereur Julien et la culture de son temps* (n. 8), p. 468; BOULNOIS, *La diversité des nations* (n. 9), pp. 820-821; RIEDWEG, *Anti-Christian Polemics and Pagan Onto-Theology* (n. 5), pp. 252-253. In the letter Julian refers to these gods as τοῖς γενεάρχαις θεοῖς, which seems equivalent to the ἐθνάρχαις καὶ πολιοῦχοις θεοῖς mentioned in *c. Gal.* fr. 21.8-9. See also Origen’s description of his opponents as those who held to a “diversity of spiritual natures” among heavenly beings and human souls, resulting from the fact that they “were established by different creators” (*Princ.* 1.8.1-2). Like Julian, Origen’s opponents seem to have held that a multiplicity of creators would result in a diversity of natures amongst humans.

37. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 22.5-7, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.24.7-9: Οἱ γὰρ νομοθέται μικρὰ ταῖς φύσεσι καὶ ταῖς ἐπιτηδειότησι διὰ τῆς ἀγωγῆς προσέθεσαν; *c. Gal.* fr. 26.22-23, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.40.26-27: Ἐχρῆν γὰρ πρῶτον διαφόρους ὑπεῖναι φύσεις τοῖς ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσι διαφόρως ἔσομένους.

38. Galen, *De usu partim* 11.14. A similar criticism of the resurrection is voiced by the anonymous Hellene in Macarius Magnes, *Apocriticus* 4.2.1-4. Cf. BOULNOIS, *La diversité*

proposed that the human body operates in a certain manner not merely because God willed it to be so but because it has been designed with features that have a specific purpose. Julian similarly alludes to Genesis 1,3 and declares it to be “insufficient” (οὐδὲ ἀπόχρη) since it ignores the fact that “the natures (τὰς φύσεις) of created things must conform to God’s commands”. The “natures” he has in mind are seemingly the human natures he has earlier referred to and Julian directly aligns these with other aspects of the natural world by using an analogy. Fire does not ascend merely by the command of God but because by nature it is “light” and the property of levity provides a causal explanation for its movement. So too, Julian reasons, the nature of a given ethnic group causes it to have a certain profile and disposition in contrast to other ethnic groups³⁹. In a final move Julian further integrates these human natures into the wider harmonious cosmos by picking up the idea found in the Hippocratic treatise *Airs, Waters, Places* that the atmosphere, geography, and heavenly bodies have an impact upon humans, including somatic differences between various ethnic groups⁴⁰. Human nature, therefore, operates according to the same principles as nature does on a cosmic scale.

Bouffartigue argued that when Julian introduces human nature as a “concurrent cause” of human diversity alongside the presiding deities, he “finds himself embarrassed” by his inability to reconcile these two competing causal explanations⁴¹. It is true that the emperor does not explicitly explain how these two claims relate to one another, at least in

des nations (n. 9), p. 822; EAD., *Contre Julien II* (n. 4), p. 93. For a brief discussion of this passage in Galen, see P. VAN DER EIJK, *Galen and Early Christians on the Role of the Divine in the Causation and Treatment of Health and Disease*, in *Early Christianity* 5 (2014) 337-370, pp. 349-360. On Galen’s understanding of human nature, see ID., *Galen on the Nature of Human Beings*, in P. ADAMSON – R.E. HANSBERGER – J. WILBERDING (eds.), *Philosophical Themes in Galen*, London, Institute of Classical Studies, 2014, 89-134. Though not explicitly engaged in polemic like Galen and Julian, Sallustius similarly asserts that “one can observe” the operation of divine providence in human “nature” from the fact that each part of the body fulfills a certain function and so the entirety is “in accord with reason” (*De deis et mundo* 9.2).

39. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 26.6-11, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.40.8-14.

40. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 26.25-27, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.40.29-31. The notion that environmental factors produce differences in bodies and dispositions among nations goes back at least to Hippocrates, *Aer.* 24, as noted by BOUFFARTIGUE, *La diversité des nations* (n. 8), pp. 119-120; BOULNOIS, *La diversité des nations* (n. 9), p. 821, n. 89; HILTON, *Nomos, Physis, and Ethnicity* (n. 9), p. 536. For a detailed survey of the ancient sources that address this issue, see ISAAC, *The Invention of Racism* (n. 2), pp. 55-109. *Airs, Waters, Places* is also briefly mentioned in VLASSOPOULOS, *Greeks and Barbarians* (n. 2), p. 192. One source close to Julian who similarly appropriated this tradition was Porphyry who commented upon the divergent impact of the environment upon humans in the northern and southern regions of the earth, referring specifically the size of their bodies (*De antr. nymph.* 28).

41. BOUFFARTIGUE, *La diversité des nations* (n. 8), pp. 117-119. Cf. BOULNOIS, *La diversité des nations* (n. 9), p. 823; EAD., *Contre Julien II* (n. 4), pp. 92-94, 372, n. 1. She agrees with Bouffartigue that Julian does not succeed in reconciling the two competing causes he sets forth.

our surviving fragments, but he does not express any concern about their possible conflict, so it could be that the appearance of this problem arises merely because of modern assumptions about the incompatibility of divine agency and natural causation. We might speculate that Julian is assuming the presiding deity impacts the quality of a nation's character through the act of creating it, specifically by joining the souls received from the Demiurge to matter in the particular kind of mixture specific to a given ethnic group. In a similar manner, Porphyry argued that disembodied souls possessed a greater degree of "self-determination" which was subsequently "hindered" by the physical "constitution" of the living being into which it descended and was embodied. In short, "the power of self-determination hinges upon the constitution" possessed by a particular embodied soul (ἐξηρητῆσθαι δὲ τὸ αὐτεξούσιον τοῦτο τῆς κατασκευῆς)⁴². In this fragment the example Porphyry gives is the choice a disembodied soul makes between a life as an animal or a human, and it is not clear whether he has distinctions among humans in mind as well. Such a rationale could, nonetheless, be easily extended to account for different national characteristics that arise from the particular mixture of matter and soul that make up the nature of a given ethnic group. Julian is, after all, emphatic that providence must extend all the way to "our physical constitution" (τῆς φυσικῆς ἡμῶν κατασκευῆς)⁴³.

Furthermore, the specific nature possessed by each nation by virtue of its creation at the hands of its patron deity might then be passed on from one generation to the next by procreation. Though Porphyry does not say as much directly in the above fragment, the particular constitution possessed by an embodied soul would presumably be a function, at least in part, of its inheritance from its biological parents, a topic he explored at length elsewhere⁴⁴. Something like this seems to be what is implied by a passage in Julian's *Misopogon* in which he compares the perpetuation of "customs" (τὰ ἥθη) from one generation to another in a given people group to "plants" that "naturally pass on their qualities" to their descendants⁴⁵. Hence, the particular nature or constitution of a person would be determined by the body they inherit from their parents, which ultimately goes back to the original creation of a given nation, along with the geographic

42. Porphyry, fr. 270 SMITH, discussed in ADAMSON, *Freedom, Providence and Fate* (n. 22), pp. 447-448.

43. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 24.26-27, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.33.26-27.

44. See the translation of his treatise on this topic: J. WILBERDING, *Porphyry: To Gaurus on How Embryos Are Ensouled and On What Is in Our Power*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2011.

45. Julian, *Mis.* 348b-d, on which see BOUFFARTIGUE, *L'empereur Julien et la culture de son temps* (n. 8), p. 468. Julian's specific point in this passage is to excuse the poor treatment he received from the Antiochenes on the basis of their imitation of the morals of the founder of their city, Antiochus, though he goes on to broaden the point by referring to Syrians, Arabs, Celts, Thracians, Paeonians, and Mysians.

location they inhabit. Moreover, the effect of a nation's particular nature would, presumably, be reinforced by the ongoing governance of its presiding deity enacted through ancestral religious rites. This is obviously speculative, but suffices to indicate we should be cautious about imputing inconsistency to Julian's philosophical account of ethnicity. Whatever the case, it is clear that his main point is to emphasize that divine agency alone is insufficient to account for human diversity, since the Demiurge has established a cosmos of complex but predictable causes that operate in harmony to produce the diversity we perceive in the human species.

This focus on embodied constitution should not cause us to overlook the fact that Julian maintains that his philosophy of ethnicity explains all types of diversity among ethnic groups, including those that we would think of as cultural and intellectual. For example, when it comes to the diversity of laws (νόμους), he claims that these are a function of the nature of a given nation⁴⁶. As we have seen, the nature of an ethnic group is determined by its ruling deity, so Julian seems to be envisioning a sort of cascading causal chain, whereby the governing deity, in concert with environmental factors, determines the nature of a nation and the nation then produces laws in keeping with that nature. The connection between the two stages of Julian's account is indicated by the repeated use of the word οἰκεῖος. The god of a given nation governs it "in a manner appropriate to itself" (οἰκεῖως ἑαυτῷ), and human nature makes laws that are "appropriate to itself" (οἰκεῖος ἑαυτῆ)⁴⁷. The same holds true for intellectual pursuits. Despite the civilizing influence of Rome that had ruled over the Western world for centuries, Julian laments the fact that in that part of the world there are still "very few people with an aptitude for philosophy or geometry or other such pursuits". Among the Western nations one observes some who are skilled "merely in dialectic and rhetoric"⁴⁸. Based upon what else Julian says about the causes of diversity in the human species, we may assume that the poor performance of Westerners in abstruse disciplines is due to the geography of that region, to the essence of their presiding deities, or to both.

Bouffartigue proposed that Julian makes a clear distinction between those ethnic traits that are immutable, such as τρόποι and ἥθη, and those that are susceptible to change through educational formation, such as ἐπιτηδεύματα, ἐπιτηδειότητες, νόμματα, and νόμοι⁴⁹. However, the progression

46. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 22.2-5, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.24.4-7.

47. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 21.10; 22.3, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.2.13; 4.24.5. As recognized also by BOULNOIS, *La diversité des nations* (n. 9), p. 821.

48. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 22.7-13, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.24.10-15.

49. BOUFFARTIGUE, *La diversité des nations* (n. 8), p. 115. The same claim is mentioned in ID., *L'Empereur Julien et les barbares: réalisme et illusion*, in C. LEPELLEY *et al.* (eds.), *Haut Moyen Âge: Culture, éducation et société (Mélanges Pierre Riché)*, La Garenne-Colombes, Éditions Publidix, 1990, 49-58, p. 52; ID., *L'empereur Julien et la culture de son temps* (n. 8), p. 468. In contrast, the close and inseparable connection between these

of Julian's argument in these fragments allows for no such firm contrast. As we move down the causal chain, a nation's φύσις, ἦθη, and ἐπιτηδειότητες give rise to its νόμοι and in fact determine the manner in which culture and civilization develop among its people. This point is vividly conveyed via Julian's recounting of the fate of the Scythian Anacharsis. Herodotus had narrated in succession the story of two Scythians who had adopted a Greek way of life, Anacharsis and Scyles, both of whom were executed by their countrymen for following "foreign customs" (ξενικὸς νόμος)⁵⁰. Julian seemingly confused the two men, since he mentions Anacharsis as being initiated into Bacchic rites whereas Herodotus had only said this about Scyles, but his point is nonetheless clear. While Herodotus had used these two men's lives to highlight an aversion to foreign influence that he took to be particular to the Scythians, Julian generalizes the example and sees it as an illustration of a universal constraint placed upon the νόμοι and culture of a nation by its particular disposition or nature⁵¹. The progression of the fragment in question makes this clear, since it begins by claiming νόμοι are a product of a nation's φύσις, then mentions that lawgivers can scarcely change the ἐπιτηδειότητες and φύσεις of the nations, and concludes with the aforementioned observation about the lackluster intellectual capabilities of the Western nations, with the allusion to Anacharsis' execution appearing in the middle of the passage. The fragment closes with a terse but powerful nod back to providential causation: "So strong does nature seem to be" (Οὕτως ἰσχυρὸν οἶκεν ἡ φύσις εἶναι)⁵². Julian's philosophy of ethnicity is, therefore, an attempt to explain the existence of all diversity amongst the nations of the earth as the outworking of the same chain of physical causation originating with the Demiurge and does not allow for the cordoning off of certain areas as outside the remit of this providential design.

With this claim, Julian seems to have landed himself in something of a bind. The greater the explanatory power his philosophy of ethnicity possesses, the more rigidly deterministic it appears. His account of providential causation must not be absolutely deterministic, since the emperor can recognize isolated instances of individuals behaving in ways that run contrary to their inherited nature, such as the aforementioned Anacharsis. Similarly, Julian elsewhere tells his friend Sallustius, who was Celtic ethnically, that he had become a Greek thanks to his achievements in virtue,

various kinds of ethnic diversity in Julian's account is recognized by J. SIRINELLI, *Julien et l'histoire de l'humanité*, in *Mélanges E. Delebecque*, Aix-en-Provence, Publications de l'Université de Provence, 1983, 363-377, p. 368. Julian's commitment to the "invariability of national types" was similarly highlighted by ATHANASSIADI, *Julian* (n. 5), p. 162.

50. Herodotus, *hist.* 4.76-80. Bouffartigue does not cite or discuss the section of *c. Gal.* fr. 22 dealing with Anacharsis.

51. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 22.7, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.24.9-10.

52. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 22.12-13, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.24.15.

rhetoric, and philosophy⁵³, and the emperor's own formation in Greek *paideia* despite his self-acknowledged Thracian origins shows that he thought at least some individuals could escape from the influence of their paternal ἦθη or φύσις⁵⁴. In a later fragment of *Against the Galileans* Julian provides some explanation for these exceptions when he states that by studying the writings of the Greeks "every person", presumably regardless of ethnicity, "can become better than himself, even if he were entirely lacking in natural ability" (αὐτὸς αὐτοῦ πᾶς ἂν γένοιτο καλλίων, εἰ καὶ παντάπασιν ἀφύης τις εἴη), while a select few who "have the advantage of a good nature" (Φύσεως ... ἔχων εὖ) benefit even more and become "a gift of the gods to humanity"⁵⁵. Julian seems, therefore, to imagine that within a given nation some people have better natures than others which would account for their exceptional abilities in comparison to the other members of their ethnic group. Nonetheless, in our surviving fragments, he provides no explanation of how these individuals come to have natures superior to their peers and in fact the entire thrust of his argument is in the opposite direction, as the example of Anacharsis shows. The constraint of an ethnic nature may on occasion be overcome by an individual, but not at a population level⁵⁶, and the experience may consequently end badly for the person in question. We might, therefore, regard individuals like Anacharsis, Sallustius, and Julian as "bugs" rather than "features" of his philosophy of ethnicity. They are undeniable empirical data points he cannot fully ignore but are not what this system, in his view, is designed to produce.

Before leaving these fragments of Julian, we should consider an issue that has been lingering in the background in much of the preceding discussion but has not yet been directly addressed. The emperor clearly regards some nations as superior to others. Recently Ari Finkelstein and John Hilton have independently claimed that Julian's theory does not position any nation as inferior to another⁵⁷. Such an interpretation is impossible to

53. Julian, *Or.* 8.8. Cf. BOUFFARTIGUE, *L'Empereur Julien et les barbares* (n. 49), p. 54.

54. At *Mis.* 367c, Julian says that, although his γένος is Thracian and thus he is not one of the "children of the Greeks" (Ἑλλήνων παῖδας) like the Antiochenes, he is nevertheless "a Greek in terms of his habits" (Ἐλληνα τοῖς ἐπιτηδεύμασιν) and at *Mis.* 348d he refers to his own Mysian γένος as being "entirely boorish, austere, awkward, and unappealing" (πᾶν ἄγροικον, αὐστηρὸν, ἀδέξιον, ἀναφρόδιτον). Cf. BOUFFARTIGUE, *La diversité des nations* (n. 8), p. 115, n. 12.

55. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 55.15-18, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 7.16.29-33. Note also Julian's claim earlier in this fragment that anyone raised as a Christian who possessed "even a small fraction of natural talent" (εὐφυῖας κἄν μικρὸν μόριον) quickly abandoned the faith.

56. Cf. BOUFFARTIGUE, *La diversité des nations* (n. 8), p. 122: Julian "laisse voir avec la plus grande clarté ... qu'il ne s'intéresse pas à des individus mais à des collectivités".

57. FINKELSTEIN, *The Specter of the Jews* (n. 7), p. 60: "Each people excels at a different thing: the Greeks and the Romans at government, the Egyptians at science, and so on. Under such a system it makes little sense for any one nation to be inferior to any other"; HILTON, *Nomos, Physis, and Ethnicity* (n. 9), p. 540: "According to Julian, no race was superior or more favored by the gods than another". In contrast, BOUFFARTIGUE, *L'Empereur Julien et les barbares* (n. 49), p. 52, argued that Julian offers two ways of

maintain because Julian is abundantly clear on this point. In the midst of setting out this philosophy of ethnicity, he states that the gods have given “greater goods” (ἀγαθὰ ... μείζονα) to Greeks (among whom he numbers himself) than to the Hebrews⁵⁸, a claim that he expounded at length in the subsequent section of his treatise that is partially preserved in books 5-7 of Cyril’s *Against Julian*⁵⁹. Julian’s argument is, therefore, explicitly comparative, with the superiority of the Greeks being an essential component of this grand account of providential causation by which the Demiurge has cared for all nations on earth⁶⁰. To take just one fragment from this subsequent section to illustrate this point, the emperor later claims that the Babylonians first studied the heavens, the Egyptians first learned how to measure the earth, and Phoenician traders first discovered arithmetic, but only among the Greeks were these starting points “perfected” into the proper disciplines of astronomy, geometry, and mathematics⁶¹. His regard for the distinct contributions of other nations to the rest of humanity is, therefore, best characterized as patronizing condescension. This same attitude is evident in his comments on the Jewish god. Finkelstein has recently highlighted the high regard Julian had for the Jews and the way in which he was prepared to tolerate them and even at times use them as a model nation within his empire since they had their own distinctive customs and modes of worship handed down from antiquity⁶². However, these fragments from *Against the Galileans* make clear that this toleration came at

defining the barbarians, one of them being those nations that occupy the lower rank in the “hierarchy of cultures”. Finkelstein does recognize that Julian on occasion portrays the Judean ethnos as inferior, but he regards such statements as contradicting the emperor’s fundamentally egalitarian theory of ethnicity (p. 60). I think this is a misreading of his philosophy of ethnicity and that there is no inconsistency in his comments elsewhere on the Jews and their god.

58. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 25.11, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.38.15.

59. These “greater goods” are described in detail as the “gifts of the gods” in *c. Gal.* fr. 29-57, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 5.2-7.24.

60. This naturally raises the question of how the Greeks are related to the Romans in Julian’s thought, on which see SIRINELLI, *Julien et l’histoire de l’humanité* (n. 49), pp. 370-372.

61. Julian, *c. Gal.* 38.4-10, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 5.36.7-13, on which see SIRINELLI, *Julien et l’histoire de l’humanité* (n. 49), pp. 369-370. Julian goes on to claim that the Greeks added music to this trio to form the traditional quadrivium. Julian’s position here resembles Celsus’ claim that only the Greeks could assess the true worth of the intellectual discoveries of the barbarians (*apud* Origen, *Cels.* 1.2), on which see G.R. BOYS-STONES, *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy: A Study of Its Development from the Stoics to Origen*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 105-107; M. FREDE, *Celsus philosophus Platonicus*, in *ANRW II.36.7* (1994) 5197-5198; A.P. JOHNSON, *Religion and Identity in Porphyry of Tyre: The Limits of Hellenism in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 230-231. A similar claim already appears in Plato, *Epinomis* 987d-e: λάβωμεν δὲ ὡς ὅτι περ ἂν Ἕλληνας βαρβάρων παραλάβωσι, κάλλιον τοῦτο εἰς τέλος ἀπεργάζονται. This is in contrast to Porphyry whose “ethnographic vision exhibits, rather, a recurrent and widespread decentering of Greek cultural centrism”; so JOHNSON, *Religion and Identity in Porphyry of Tyre*, p. 252.

62. FINKELSTEIN, *The Specter of the Jews* (n. 7).

the cost of demoting the Jewish god from his status as the Creator of the world to being merely one of the many subordinate deities and not even a very important one at that since “he has been allotted control of only the tiniest portion” of the world (τὸν τοῦ ἐλαχίστου μέρους εἰληχότα τὴν ἡγεμονίαν)⁶³. And even if the Hebrews did have some awareness of the Demiurge himself, Julian is careful to insist twice that the Greeks have a superior understanding of him⁶⁴.

To be sure, Julian’s proposal that each nation has its own distinctive nature could be taken to imply a sort of relativistic outlook according to which each nature has its own ideal of perfection which is not to be judged in comparison with the ideal of a neighboring nation. That is, Scythians might not be perfect like the Greeks but they can still flourish by fulfilling the unique ideal set by their distinct Scythian nature which is no better or worse than any other ethnic group. Bouffartigue argued that Julian was taking just such a relativist approach, and was “reasoning as an objective ethnologist sensitive to diversity and not to inequality” (“raisonne en ethnologue objectif sensible à la diversité et non à l’inégalité”)⁶⁵. A similar perspective was already apparent in Julian’s predecessor, Celsus, who, as we have seen, argued that each nation should perform the practices and customs that were agreeable to its respective deity. Nonetheless, the relativistic tolerance inherent to Julian’s account grants legitimacy to each nation’s distinct identity, history, and culture only so long as it is firmly subordinated to the superiority of the Greeks who represent the highest form of human nature. Accordingly, as Aaron Johnson has argued for another ancient author, with respect to Julian, “[w]hat might at first look like the all-inclusive embrace of universal truth was only a mask for a more threatening agenda of Hellenocentric intellectual imperialism”⁶⁶.

Hence, if den Dulk is right that Origen’s account of ethnic differences contains precursors to modern racist thought, such tendencies are even clearer in the case of Julian’s philosophy of ethnicity, insofar as he regards

63. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 28.11-12, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.46.14-16. As recognized by ATHANASSIADI, *Julian* (n. 5), p. 163; RIEDWEG, *With Stoicism and Platonism* (n. 9), pp. 80-81; BOULNOIS, *La diversité des nations* (n. 9), p. 826; FINKELSTEIN, *The Specter of the Jews* (n. 7), pp. 59, 105-106. Note that on p. 105 Finkelstein quotes a passage supposedly from Julian which he references as *c. Gal.* fr. 19 (p. 198, n. 25). However, in fact what Finkelstein cites are not Julian’s words, but those of Cyril at *c. Iul.* 3.38.5-8, based upon a misreading of Masaracchia’s edition of *Against the Galileans*. Furthermore, Finkelstein later argues that in the later fragments of *Against the Galileans*, Julian offers “an entirely different presentation of the Judeans and their God”, one that is “highly positive” in contrast to his condescending portrayal in these earlier fragments. This seems to me too sharp a contrast. Julian’s later comments further bolster the legitimacy of Judaism as a religion but are still compatible with a view that the Jewish god is but a minor deity.

64. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 25.9-11; 28.2-4, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.38.13-15; 4.46.5-6.

65. BOUFFARTIGUE, *La diversité des nations* (n. 8), p. 123.

66. JOHNSON, *Religion and Identity in Porphyry of Tyre* (n. 61), p. 226, with reference to Plutarch specifically.

some nations as inherently inferior to others and offers a complex causal account to explain this state of affairs which depends upon a sort of ethnic determinism that may not be absolute but is one of its most defining features. Jean Sirinelli, therefore, rightly recognized that the “indelibility” of ethnic traits is the “more original” aspect of Julian’s proposal, with the presiding deities functioning as the “guardians or guarantors” of each nation’s distinct identity⁶⁷. Indeed, while the Hippocratic tradition of geographic determinism was operative in many ancient authors, Julian, in a seemingly unprecedented move, joined that set of ideas with Neoplatonic theology, which resulted in an even more robustly deterministic account, since it is no longer just the stars or geography that influence one’s ethnic identity in all its multifaceted reality but an elaborate and eternal divine hierarchy.

Yet it is precisely at this point that we observe most clearly how different Julian’s account is from Origen’s. By positing that each nation has its own distinct nature, Julian’s theory in fact more closely resembles that of Origen’s opponents who, he claims, argued that there must be “a diversity in the natures of souls” since otherwise one’s ethnic identity would be “the result of accident and chance” and the world would not be “administered by [God’s] providence”⁶⁸, an argument that prompted him to defend the equality of all souls, their impartial treatment by God, and the possibility that all could be redeemed. In short, Origen’s explanation for ethnic difference started from the premise that human inequality called into question divine justice, while Julian seems untroubled by the ethnic hierarchy and determinism his theory explicitly justifies⁶⁹. Bouffartigue hypothesized that Julian’s experience as a military commander and emperor contributed to the peculiar interest he shows in the topic of ethnicity⁷⁰. This is a plausible proposal and if we were to extend it, we might speculate that Julian’s status as emperor might also account for his untroubled acceptance of the profound inequality among human natures he claimed to observe in the world⁷¹.

67. SIRINELLI, *Julien et l’histoire de l’humanité* (n. 49), p. 368.

68. Origen, *Princ.* 2.9.5, discussed in DEN DULK, *Origen of Alexandria and the History of Racism* (n. 14), p. 177.

69. Perhaps the only place where Julian recognizes this problem is in his criticism of the ethnic particularity of the Jewish scriptures, which he takes to mean the Demiurge neglected all the other nations on earth (see *c. Gal.* fr. 20). As noted above, it was this criticism that prompted him to set forth his philosophy of ethnicity. Julian is, therefore, keen to ensure that the Demiurge has cared for all the nations in the world but does not seem to be bothered by the inequality produced by that providence.

70. BOUFFARTIGUE, *La diversité des nations* (n. 8), p. 115.

71. The fact that ancient theories of ethnicity were often used to justify imperialist ambitions was also highlighted in B.H. ISAAC, *Ethnic Prejudice and Racism*, in G. BOYS-STONES – B. GRAZIOSI – P. VASUNIA (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Hellenic Studies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, 328-339, p. 335.

III. CYRIL'S THEOLOGY OF HUMAN EQUALITY

When we come to Cyril's response to these fragments from Julian, we observe a strikingly different account of the relation between human nature and ethnicity, one that carries forward the centrality of human choice evident in Origen's earlier interpretation of Babel, while also being decisively shaped by theological developments that had occurred in the intervening period. While Julian's philosophy of ethnicity was designed to explain the differences that exist within the human species, the rebuttal formulated by his later Alexandrian opponent has the primary aim of defending the equality of all humanity, in at least one important respect, though it does not do away with all aspects of ethnic identity.

The difference between the views of human nature apparent in Cyril and Julian arises most fundamentally from their competing cosmologies. Julian, as we have seen, predictably follows the *Timaeus*, whereas much of book 2 of Cyril's *Against Julian* is devoted to critiquing the cosmogony of that influential Platonic dialogue and showing its deficiencies in comparison with the Mosaic account. The most consequential point of departure is that, rather than positing the creation of humanity by a host of subordinate divine beings, Cyril attributes their origin directly to a single Maker, the Triune God⁷². This point is captured particularly well in his repeated insistence that the creative act of Genesis is an instance of *αὐτουργία*, of God himself working to make humanity rather than delegating that responsibility to lesser deities⁷³. As noted by Boulnois, in taking this position, Cyril departs not only from Julian but also from Origen who had granted the tutelary angels a key role in his allegorical interpretation of the Babel story⁷⁴. Cyril, however, does not merely pass over Julian's patron deities in silence but instead subjects them to a withering and sustained critique. The introduction of the "gods who rule over nations and protect cities" in the opening Julianic fragment of book 4 elicits from his pen one of the lengthiest sections of argument in his entire apology, which is aimed at proving that Julian's gods are in fact malevolent demons who go as far as to prompt their worshippers to engage in human sacrifice⁷⁵.

Setting aside, then, the younger gods of the *Timaeus*, Cyril maintains that this common origin of all humanity establishes the common nature they share. As a result, he is able to conclude that, "if [Julian] had in mind

72. See, e.g., Cyril, *c. Iul.* 3.34.20-22: Φαμὲν οὖν εἶναι τὸν θεὸν καὶ πατέρα δι' υἱοῦ ἐν πνεύματι τῶν ὄλων δημιουργόν.

73. Cyril, *c. Iul.* 2.38.6; 2.48.23. Cf. M.-O. BOULNOIS, *Un débat entre païens et chrétiens sur la transcendance divine à partir du Contre Julien de Cyrille d'Alexandrie*, in E.A. MOUTSOPOULOS – G. LEKKAS (eds.), *La transcendance dans la philosophie grecque tardive et dans la pensée chrétienne: Actes du VI^e congrès de philosophie grecque*, Paris, Vrin, 2006, 177-196; EAD., *La diversité des nations* (n. 9), p. 828.

74. BOULNOIS, *La diversité des nations* (n. 9), pp. 827-828.

75. Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.3-23.

that certain members of the human species have been allotted a different natural origin (ἕτεροφυῶ ... γένεσιν) and are not of a nature like ours, ... his argument would no longer be about humans”⁷⁶. All humans thus have a common nature thanks to their common origin. This conceptual link is expressed most clearly in a later passage in which Cyril responds to Julian’s denigration of the social status of those attracted to Christianity:

Yet, is it not better to suppose that one human differs from another human in no respect at all, insofar as he or she is disposed by nature to be what he or she is (καθὸ φύκεν εἶναι ὅ ἐστι), but instead a single definition of [human] essence extends to everyone (εἷς κατὰ πάντων ὁ τῆς οὐσίας διήκει λόγος). “And there is one entrance into the world for all, and identical exits”, as it is written (Wis 7,6). Nonetheless, in terms of external factors (Τοῖς ... θύραθεν), people sometimes do have advantages over others, for instance having an abundance of wealth, or superior honors, or in terms of which person is a servant (οἰκέτης) and which is the one being served. Despite this, no matter what state someone may be in with respect to such factors, there is a single nature for all humans and inherent to it is an aptitude (ἐπιτηδεῖως) for all that is commendable, since it is also wise and able to distinguish what is worse from what is better⁷⁷.

Cyril does not explain the logic of his quotation of Wisdom 7,6 in this passage but the point is clear. All humans enter the world in the same manner, thanks to the choice and action of the same Maker, and as such they do not differ in terms of their nature or essence. At one level, therefore, he agrees with Julian that the number of human natures that exist in the world is a function of the number of creators, and disagrees merely over how many makers there are. However, the above passage also reveals a more fundamental disagreement between the two, since it suggests the bishop uses the language of “human nature” to refer to a more restricted sense of human identity than his pagan opponent. While Julian attributed all manner of differences amongst humans to their underlying different natures, Cyril sets aside contingent features like social roles as accidental traits that do not define someone’s φύσις.

In the final sentence of the passage quoted above, we observe one of the most decisive and strategic moves Cyril makes as he responds to Julian’s philosophy of ethnicity: he consistently shifts the debate into the terrain of morality, recasting his opponent’s arguments in terms of humanity’s ability to pursue virtue and respond appropriately to its Maker⁷⁸. Thus, when Julian maintains that the practice of incest among the Persians

76. Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.36.17-20.

77. Cyril, *c. Iul.* 6.33.1-13.

78. As also recognized by BOUFFARTIGUE, *La diversité des nations* (n. 8), p. 122, who claimed that in making this move Cyril was misreading Julian since the emperor was not interested in morality but only the “psychological profile” of an ethnic group. Bouffartigue’s interpretation might, however, amount to a misreading of Cyril’s argument, which

or the bloodthirsty savagery of the Scythians was due to the particular nature of their ruling deity, Cyril takes him to be saying “the Craftsman of the universe implanted into some people a natural defect” (φυσικὴν ... τὴν φαυλότητα)⁷⁹, since these ethnic groups are inevitably constrained in their pursuit of virtue by the nature they have been allotted. Focusing the debate on moral difference limits the range of diversity in comparison with the scope of Julian’s original theory, with, for example, bodily differentiation being notably excluded from Cyril’s remit of concern. He does, nonetheless, comment upon a number of the areas Julian had raised and presents a consistently moralizing take on them: “if the aim and intention of everyone on earth was to devote themselves to going through life in accordance with what pleased God, then all people, inclining unreservedly towards good deeds, would have one character, way of life, and law” (τρόπος ... καὶ πολιτεία καὶ νόμος)⁸⁰. The numerical alignment observed above with respect to Cyril’s cosmology is here again apparent. Both Julian and Cyril regard the “character, way of life, and law” of a given people as dependent upon the deity responsible for its creation. However, since Cyril has opted for a single divine Maker for all humanity, the entire species has a common goal across these domains, rooted in their common nature.

Of course, the various ethnic groups of the world do not exhibit a unity in these areas, but this present state of disunity Cyril attributes, not to divergent human natures, but to the act of the human will. The true “cause” (Αἰτίαν) of difference among the nations is simply that “everyone did not choose to honor the good and blameless life” (τὸ μὴ πάντας ἐλέσθαι τιμᾶν τὴν εὐκλεῆ καὶ ἀμόμητον ζωὴν)⁸¹. This emphasis upon choice, does not, however, mean Cyril completely ignores other factors beyond the individual. Rather, “we shall instead assign the difference among the nations in the area of habits (τὴν τῶν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσι τρόπων διαφορὰν) to their customs, upbringings, and the founders of the races (ἔθνεσί τε καὶ ἀνατροφαῖς καὶ τοῖς τῶν γενῶν ἀρχηγέταις), each of whom probably also issued for their respective people laws that resemble their own personal mindset (ταῖς ἑαυτῶν γνώμας)”⁸². Cyril, therefore, like Julian, holds that the leaders of a given people have an influence over their national or ethnic character. However, whereas Julian imagined a two-stage process, with a presiding deity creating a distinctive national character and then human legislators issuing laws in keeping with that nature, Cyril ends the causal chain at the human legislators themselves. They are responsible for this variety and no metaphysically higher beings are necessary to

seems to be that the “psychological profile” of a given person or ethnic group cannot be easily divorced from moral considerations.

79. Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.27.9-10.

80. Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.36.3-6.

81. Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.35.17-19.

82. Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.27.12-15.

account for it. Moreover, whereas Julian had drawn a correlation between the quality of human nature present in a nation and the quality of the laws that it produces, Cyril replaces φύσις with γνώμη (“mindset”) in this scheme, thereby emphasizing human agency rather than external constraints. It is the “personal mindset” of a lawgiver for a given nation that determines the quality of its laws which in turn influences the character of its people⁸³.

The elimination of φύσις as a constraining category upon human action allows Cyril to account for individuals who defy their ethnic heritage more easily than it was for Julian. In fact, this thesis is arguably what he sees as the most important implication of his alternate cosmology. Yes, structural factors beyond the individual have an impact upon a person’s character, habits, and morals, but even those who “have been trained by defective laws to have an incorrect disposition ... can easily and voluntarily change course to a superior beneficial state” (εἰ φαύλοις τινὲς πεπαιδωγῶνται νόμοις πρὸς τὸ μὴ ἔχον ὀρθῶς, μεταφοιτήσκειαν ἂν εὐκόλως ἐθέλοντι πρὸς τὰ ἀμείνω καὶ ὀνησιφόρα)⁸⁴. Or, as he says elsewhere, some “Greeks and Romans”, despite benefiting from excellent “laws”, have “the worst sort of character” (δυστροπωτάτους), while some “barbarians” excel in “uprightness and virtue”⁸⁵, as evidenced by a litany of virtuous barbarians he quickly runs through⁸⁶. I suggest that Cyril presses this point because he recognizes it is a vulnerability in Julian’s philosophy of ethnicity insofar as he fails to provide an explanation for such exceptions to ethnic stereotypes. If what Julian proposes is correct, then, Cyril observes, “none of the Greeks and Romans should act like a barbarian ... and, conversely, among the barbarians there should be a severe shortage of people who are gentle and wise, or even practitioners of justice, since it is impossible for nature to be forced into being something other than whatever it happens to be”⁸⁷. To be sure, Cyril does, like Julian, maintain that there are distinctions in character and disposition at the population level of ethnic groups. He assumes that, in general, the “barbarians” exhibit “boldness and harshness” and are “easily provoked ... and eager for bloodshed”, and he passes along some of the same stereotypes as Julian, such as Scythian love for murder and Persian incest⁸⁸. Nonetheless,

83. If Isaac is correct that in the classical period Greeks affirmed “the primacy of nature” in the shaping of “political and social institutions” (ISAAC, *Ethnic Prejudice and Racism* [n. 71], pp. 333-334), Cyril appears to break decisively with this tradition by claiming not merely that human choice has the most influence in this area but rather that it is the sole determining factor in the formation of such institutions.

84. Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.35.28-30.

85. Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.27.16-21.

86. Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.28, drawing upon Clement, *str.* 1.15.70-73.

87. Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.25.17-21.

88. Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.6.12, 22-24; 4.38.36-42. For other references to the barbarians in *Against Julian*, see *c. Iul.* 4.10.12-14; 4.45.16-20; 5.10.4-7; 6.7.11-15; 6.40.28-31; 7.40.18-22; 10.13.1-6; 10.40.34-35; fr. 53.

the cause for such immoral tendencies, in Cyril's account, is not an inherent nature specific to each nation but merely the upbringing and culture in which someone has been formed, the influence of which is not ultimately decisive.

In short, what we observe in Cyril is a decoupling of human nature from ethnic identity and a concomitant dissociating of moral capability and ethnicity. This distinction emerges with the greatest clarity in his response to Julian's argument that geography explains the somatic differences among ethnic groups⁸⁹. The emperor did not specify which aspects of bodily identity he had in mind, but his mention of the Germans and Scythians on the one hand and Libyans and Ethiopians on the other suggests he was alluding to skin color, among other attributes⁹⁰. Cyril accordingly responds:

Furthermore, I am amazed that he also takes the colors of bodies (τὰ τῶν σωμάτων χρώματα) as proof that one must assume there are different natures underlying the nations (διάφορος τοῖς ἔθνεσι ὑπεστί φύσις). But, if he imagines that in making this claim he is thinking or saying something true, he fails to notice that he is mistaken. For it seems to me this would surely mean that all who are the same color think in the same way as each other and agree in their thoughts (τοὺς ἐνὸς ὄντας χρώματος ὁμογνωμονεῖν ἀλλήλοις ἅπαντας καὶ συμφέρεσθαι τοῖς φρονήμασι)! So if we should find a good person who has white skin (λευκόχρωος), this would mean that there is no one good among those lacking this attribute. But if, on the contrary, we should find a good person who has a dark complexion and is black (φαιός τε καὶ μέλας), then similarly there would be no one good among those with white bodies. Aren't these ideas immediately ridiculous? Hasn't he spouted out random nonsense? Isn't he vomiting words filled with the most extreme boorishness? How could anyone argue otherwise⁹¹?

Note, first of all, that Cyril once more narrows the debate to the issue of morality, specifically whether or not someone is "good". This is undoubtedly not the issue Julian had in mind when he commented on somatic differentiation. However, as we have seen, his philosophical account closely ties together physical characteristics with intellectual and cultural ones into a single causal system, so Cyril is not completely misreading the emperor when he takes him to be claiming that all the people of a given ethnic group not only have the same skin color but also "agree in their thoughts". Cyril has, I propose, focused his opposition to Julian on this point because he regards it as the most objectionable aspect of Julian's account, specifically the notion that one could derive a person's moral status from their ethnic identity. It is important to be clear about what Cyril does not say here. His opposition to Julian leaves open the

89. Julian, *c. Gal.* fr. 26.23-27, *apud* Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.40.28-31.

90. As recognized by BOUFFARTIGUE, *La diversité des nations* (n. 8), p. 122.

91. Cyril, *c. Iul.* 4.42.30-40.

possibility that other kinds of differences might track with ethnic identity, with some nations being, say, more intelligent or skillful in certain domains (though it is perhaps significant that he does not say this). But when it comes to morally significant differences, ethnic attributes like skin color neither constrain one's development nor are they a reliable indicator of one's level of achievement in the pursuit of virtue. Moreover, whatever differences do exist amongst various ethnic groups are not, on his account, rooted in a diversity of "natures" they possess.

In other words, ethnicity as such is simply not Cyril's concern. It is perhaps for this reason that Bouffartigue, in the final sentence of his paper, claimed that the Alexandrian bishop committed "a methodological error" ("une erreur de méthode") by "erasing all nations" ("efface toutes les nations") with his "universal anthropology" ("anthropologie universelle")⁹². If one were assuming Julian's starting point and aiming to set out a theory that accounted for all aspects of human diversity, then this criticism would have some merit. Cyril, however, is simply not interested in conceding this much ground to his interlocutor, presumably because he does not agree with Julian's premise that divine providence would be undermined if such aspects of human identity were not the result of design. Moreover, though he does not think that accounting for the origins of ethnicity is germane to his argument, Cyril does tacitly acknowledge the legitimacy of at least some aspects of ethnic identity. We have already seen his comments about skin color. A similarly relativistic attitude appears later in book 7 in response to Julian's valorization of the Greek language, with Cyril proposing that there is no objective standard by which to judge the worth of a given language since all languages are "gifts from God" and each one "has a distinctive beauty when taken on its own terms"⁹³. Given that skin color and language were features associated with ethnic identity in antiquity⁹⁴, Cyril's comments on these topics suggest that his universal anthropology hardly does away with all ethnic differentiation, as Bouffartigue claimed. Rather, he simply regards genuine ethnic diversity as *adiaphora*, theologically and morally speaking, and sees no need to explain its origin.

If this interpretation of Cyril's comments on ethnicity is correct, then it represents a significant departure from not only Julian's theory, but also that of Origen. To be sure, there are elements of continuity with the earlier

92. BOUFFARTIGUE, *La diversité des nations* (n. 8), p. 126.

93. Cyril, *c. Iul.* 7.22.19-20. See the similar remarks at Cyril, *c. Iul.* 7.7.6-9.

94. Skin color was not as central to ancient accounts of ethnicity as it has been in the modern era, but it did come up for discussion on occasion (cf. Ps.-Hippocrates, *Airs, Waters, Places* 24; Strabo 15.1.24; Ps.-Aristotle, *Physiogn.* 812a; Galen, *De temperamentis* 1.628). For a study of this theme as it appears in one prominent Christian author of antiquity, see A.P. JOHNSON, *The Blackness of Ethiopians: Classical Ethnography and Eusebius' Commentary on the Psalms*, in *Harvard Theological Review* 99 (2006) 165-186. On the connection between language and ethnicity, see, e.g., Clement of Alexandria's comments at *str.* 6.15.129.1, and on foreign language and the "discourse of otherness" among ancient Christian authors, see MINETS, *The Slow Fall of Babel* (n. 13), chapter 5.

Alexandrian, most importantly the centrality of the role played by the human will in explaining diversity. However, the later Alexandrian bishop departs from his predecessor by dispensing with the role Origen had ascribed to the choices made by human souls prior to embodiment and emphasizing instead the freedom of humans in the present world to choose whether or not to follow their Maker, regardless of whatever accidental qualities they happen to possess or structural impediments they happen to face. In one sense this removes some of the precursors to racist ideas den Dulk discerns in Origen. However, by doing away with pre-embodied choice, Cyril thereby also undermines Origen's proposed theodicy and offers no alternate explanation for the problem of human inequality that had given rise to Origen's account in the first place. In this respect, Cyril appears as oblivious to Origen's concern as Julian⁹⁵.

IV. CONCLUSION

As we saw at the conclusion of the first half of this article, Julian's philosophy of ethnicity assumes a clear ethnocentrism insofar as he regards the Greeks as the most divinely favored and advanced nation on earth. In conclusion, we should not fail to observe that Cyril's theology of human equality similarly contains an ineradicable ethnocentrism of a different sort, despite his dissociation of ethnicity from human nature. Intrinsic to the bishop's account is the notion that one particular nation occupies a central role in human history insofar as God revealed himself in a unique way to Israel, from whom came the incarnate Word, and Cyril regarded himself and the multi-ethnic ecclesial community he represented as the heir to that unique ethnic history and identity⁹⁶. Moreover, as Cyril argues

95. Similarly E.A. CLARK, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 6: "When Origen's theory of the origin and fall of creatures was rejected by Western ecclesiastical authorities at the turn of the fifth century, the central question that had stimulated his theology (how to square the justice, goodness, and power of God with the miseries and inequalities of the present life) remained open".

96. In Cyril's view the disciples serve as the link between ethnic Israel and the church since they were themselves Jewish but also the "beginning of a spiritual nation" (γένουσι ἀρχὴ ... τοῦ πνευματικοῦ) (Jo. 15,14-15 [PUSEY 2.581.18-19]). To substantiate this link he often appeals to Ps 44,17 [LXX] – "In place of your fathers your sons have been born; you will appoint them as rulers in all the earth" – with the disciples being the "sons" who have been born from Israel to become worldwide rulers. Cf. Cyril, *Ps. 44,17* (PG 69.1045), on which see M.R. CRAWFORD, *Cyril of Alexandria's Trinitarian Theology of Scripture*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 99-103. On Cyril's ecclesiology, see also N. RUSSELL, *The Church in the Commentaries of St Cyril of Alexandria*, in *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 7 (2007) 70-85, and on his relation to Jews and Judaism, see R.L. WILKEN, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind: A Study of Cyril of Alexandria's Exegesis and Theology*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1971; D.A. KEATING, *Supersessionism in Cyril of Alexandria*, in *Studia Patristica* 68 (2013) 119-124.

at length in book four of *Against Julian*, all the various local religious cults that served to define the diverse nations of the earth had no legitimacy in his view but were instead led by malevolent demonic forces who had usurped the rule of the one true God and were seeking to harm rather than benefit humanity (*c. Iul.* 4.3-23). In this respect, Cyril's ethnocentrism is even more radical than Julian's. The emperor was willing to tolerate any national deity or religious cult provided that it was redefined as needed to fit into his Neoplatonic and imperial hierarchy, as is seen most clearly in his treatment of Judaism. Cyril, however, does not merely demote the gods of the earth to a lower rank in a universal hierarchy but instead insists that they must be denounced entirely as all the nations of the earth submit themselves solely to the rule of the Christian God. We should recall that it was precisely this audacious claim that raised Julian's ire in the first place and inspired him to set forth an alternate theory that attributed ethnic diversity to universal providential care⁹⁷.

Yet it is just this bold rejection of all other gods that allows Cyril to posit such a robust account of human equality and freedom, since it sweeps away all mediating divine beings and places all humans in equal proximity to a single Creator, equipped with an identical capacity to pursue a common ethical standard. His emphasis on human freedom might at first appear liberating, in that it sets aside the theological justification for ethnic hierarchy and the natural constraints upon moral character that are intrinsic to Julian's theory, and it therefore seemingly grants greater scope for the development of individual human potential. However, Cyril's purpose in claiming that the will is free of external determination is to insist that it is for that very reason responsible to its Maker to shun vice and embrace virtue. That is, if Julian's toleration of ethnic difference requires a sort of ethnic determinism and a denigration of certain nations as inferior, Cyril's ideal of human equality requires submission to a common Creator. As such, this theology of human equality might seem to be an example of the sort of "universalizing knowledge claims" Denise Kimber Buell has argued possess "racist potential" since it insists upon a "compulsory mutability"⁹⁸, that is, the expectation that all members of the human species should convert to Christianity in order to "count as fully human"⁹⁹. Yet, as we have seen, Cyril's ideal of a universal anthropology in which all humanity is enabled and expected to submit to the same God does not require the

97. Cyril's response to Julian's attack on Jewish particularity is found at *c. Iul.* 3.47-50. He uses the analogy of a horse trainer who is tasked with taming a herd of young horses and can only do so by training one horse at a time (*c. Iul.* 3.49.19-35). Cyril also appeals to divine inscrutability. Like the horse trainer who knows what is best for each horse, God knows "the fitting moment" (*ἐν καιρῷ τῷ καθήκοντι*) when it is appropriate for "the remaining multitude of nations to be deemed worthy of care and providence" (*Ἡξίωται ... φειδοῦς καὶ προνοίας ... τῶν ἔθνων ἢ ἕτερα πληθῆς*) (*c. Iul.* 3.50.8-9; cf. 3.50.19-20), and mere humans should not question his judgment.

98. KIMBER BUELL, *Early Christian Universalism* (n. 19), p. 121.

99. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

erasure of all ethnic differentiation and his strident defense of a common human nature possessed by all, regardless of their ethnic identity or religious affiliation, serves as a bulwark against the notion that adherents of other religions are somehow not fully human. It therefore seems unwarranted to regard Cyril's universalism as activating the "racist potential" highlighted by Kimber Buell, though his argument for the equality of human moral capacity certainly does rely on totalizing truth claims, most fundamentally the notion that all humans possess a common nature.

As I have argued above, Cyril's insistence upon a common human nature was intended, above all, to ensure that each person was free to live a virtuous life and could therefore be held responsible for their actions. This was of course not a new theme in Christian literature. One of the earliest defenses of this position, specifically with reference to ethnicity, was the *Book of the Laws of the Countries* of Bardaisan, the earliest prose Syriac text attributed to a known author. Against a notion of ethnic determinism in the realm of customs, Bardaisan argued that humans have the freedom to live virtuously, even if it means departing from the traditions of their particular ethnic group¹⁰⁰. Origen demonstrates a similar concern, seeking to safeguard the possibility that "even superlatively vicious human beings are capable of radical moral revision"¹⁰¹. Cyril stands in continuity with Bardaisan and Origen on this point. However, whereas Bardaisan maintained that Fate still has some control over a person's life and Origen believed someone's identity was conditioned by the pre-incarnate choices their souls had made, Cyril offered an even more strident version of this thesis that set aside all supposed constraints upon one's scope for moral action. This historically significant claim is best understood as the counterpart to the position of his pagan combatant. If Julian developed the most robustly deterministic account of ethnic hierarchy in antiquity, it prompted his Christian opponent to articulate the most unqualified insistence that ethnicity had nothing to do with whether or not one could become a Christian.

Institute for Religion and Critical Inquiry Matthew R. CRAWFORD
 Australian Catholic University
 115 Victoria Parade
 Fitzroy, VIC 3065
 Australia
 matthew.crawford@acu.edu.au

100. For an overview of the argument of Bardaisan's text, see S.F. JOHNSON, *Dialogue and Catalogue: Fate, Free Will, and Belief in the Book of the Laws of the Countries*, in L. AYRES – M.W. CHAMPION – M.R. CRAWFORD (eds.), *The Intellectual World of Late Antique Christianity: Reshaping Classical Traditions*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2023, 118-133.

101. K. GIBBONS, *Who Reads the Stars? Origen of Alexandria on Ethnic Reasoning and Astrological Discourse*, in R. FUTO KENNEDY – M. JONES-LEWIS (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Identity and Environment in the Classical and Medieval Worlds*, London, Routledge, 2015, 230-246, p. 243.

ABSTRACT. — In his anti-Christian treatise *Against the Galileans*, the emperor Julian objected to the Hebrew Bible's claim that Israel was God's special possession and, in response, elaborated a sophisticated philosophy of ethnicity that explained all aspects of diversity in the human species as resulting from a complex causal network in which patron deities operated in concert with natural forces to produce distinct "natures" for each people group, which in turn influenced their laws, culture, and intellectual achievements. In Julian's view, only if such divine causes can be identified for all aspects of one's identity and nature could the universal Craftsman be said to have providentially cared for all nations of the earth. This pairing of the Hippocratic tradition of geographic determinism with Neoplatonic theology in Julian's theory resulted in the most robustly deterministic account of ethnic hierarchy in antiquity. When he came to write his rebuttal of Julian's treatise several decades later, Cyril of Alexandria formulated a moral critique of the emperor's philosophical proposal, arguing that, if humans have different natures that constrain their behavior, this can only mean that some have been endowed with a natural defect. In place of Julian's philosophy of ethnicity, Cyril therefore proposed a theology of human equality according to which all humanity had a common nature, deriving from a single Creator, and therefore an equivalent capacity for pursuing virtue. Contingent aspects of human identity such as one's upbringing, as well as ethnic traits like skin color and language, thus had no bearing upon a person's moral capabilities. The present article maps the contours of this debate between Julian and Cyril and traces its origins in the account of human diversity set forth in Origen's *Against Celsus*.