

Our Constant Companion

In early January 2010 I had completed a seven month project on the **Life of Moses** by Gregory of Nyssa. That project consisted of carefully reading the Greek original and inserting key transliterated words and phrases into sentences which I had deemed as being significant with respect to growth in the moral and spiritual life. Actually, that's what Gregory's book is all about. Appreciation of these insertions and comments fit in nicely with the practice of *lectio divina*, the slow, meditative reading associated with Scripture but also applicable to texts such as the **Life**. This process took almost six and a half months, posting updates of the text on this same Home Page as they became available. Upon having reached the midway point, I stopped and wondered if such tedious work was worth continuing. After all, my task consisted in making countless insertions, time consuming and somewhat unreflective work. In the process the question would arise, who would profit from them? Even if no one would benefit, I gained a more intimate knowledge into Gregory's way of thinking as expressed in the **Life of Moses**. That alone was invaluable. Yet something somewhere says that personal gain must be shared one way or another. After less than a week's break I returned with the intent of expanding those insertions, of making comments pertinent to them. I was hoping to work from within the text itself and expand outward, not unlike rolling out pie dough in all directions. Special attention would be focused upon how Gregory employs prepositions both prefixed to words and free standing. Now that I had begun that task, I was a bit intimidated and unsure as how to proceed. After just several sentences from one paragraph of the **Life** the text expanded considerably. I had no idea where this would lead because it required stopping to reflect upon the text as opposed to copying and inserting words which threatened to become mechanical over time. I had to weigh this against the possibility that someone somewhere out there would find the text helpful. Perhaps due to this questioning, I came away with the sense that never do we act alone, that our activity is meant for a larger audience. The nature of our project is secondary; it's what we bring to it that counts. While all this was coming to fruition, I wondered if some kind of invisible yet constant companion might be dwelling within us (or at least was in the neighborhood) which gave life to this whole process.

This essentially solitary endeavor doesn't garner much support from other persons, so it can be difficult to find a sympathetic ear. After all, we shouldn't find it unsurprising to find few people interested in it which raises a point that was in back of my mind the entire six months of ploughing through the **Life of Moses**. Granted, most people aren't inclined to spend their time inserting transliterated, patristic Greek words into a document. Still, it exemplifies a common experience. While engaged in the process I passed through three seasons: I started in summer, worked through autumn and completed in the dead of winter midway through January. Only the spring season was missing. All the while I could hear outside in the background people going about their business in accord with a given season: the cutting of grass, the raking of leaves, a gradual diminishment of outdoor sounds until it culminated in the muffled sound of trucks plowing snow. All the while I was doing this insertion thing. Towards autumn I got the sense that in a modest way my work was partaking of the eternal. Far from being presumptuous, it turned out to be true. The reason? I was outside the mainstream of normal activity yet fully present to it. Such activity in the form of background sounds (I call them that as opposed to noises, for they became companions of a sort) raised the question of whether I was wasting my time or not. There was nothing against which to gage it, so it seemed. Despite these doubts, the **Life** was communicating something very deep, hard to put my fingers on. Hopefully the "rolling out" of the text from within like dough might disclose this, especially since it was being done over an extended period of time. Part and parcel with this desire was the fact that most people don't have access to the Greek text and consider it as belonging to scholars, etc. This turned out to be a more persistent mis-perception than I imagined, one I felt must be overcome and which formed part of the reason that propelled me forward. The treasures hidden in a text as the **Life of Moses** can and should be made available to a wider audience, surely Gregory's intent.

The project just delineated requires time or better, leisure. I prefer the Latin term *otium* because it's more specific, even technical, in that it demands a type of attention you don't find in other occupations. First you need to foster the circumstances to effect *otium*, and for me that is the monastic environment. At the same time the monastery puts constraints upon *otium*. You can't run around to libraries and consult people (however, the Internet has been a boon in this regard; not a substitute but an instrument tailored just right for us monks) and are required to follow the daily routine. To the untrained eye this routine appears restricted and taken up with liturgical observances. Sometimes monks do find it this way, but if you're after *otium*, you came to the right place. Not just that but here *otium* is practiced over one's lifetime, not just for a limited duration. That makes it a bit more challenging yet open to more opportunities never you'd get elsewhere. Despite the monastic observances taken as constrictions and even trivial compared with what other people are going through, any monk with some years under his belt will testify that they become bonds not of oppression but of freedom. They allow you to reach levels hitherto unknown. Rarely does another environment offer such a luxury to devote several hours daily to prayer and study. Furthermore, this is done in an atmosphere of special peace and tranquility as opposed to a cubbyhole tucked away in a library or a study room in a university. Scholarly minded folks who've spent extended time in the monastery discovered that they may not have long blocks of time at their disposal as at home, but the time allotted to them is of superior quality, so superior that they get more work done and work of a higher quality than elsewhere. To prevent the monastery as environment for *otium* from getting rarified, there's interaction with community members. People are people, monks or otherwise, so rubbing elbows with them at those times apart from *otium* is a valuable, even necessary, counterpart. It'd be foolish to exit your cell and, for example, and start talking about how Gregory of Nyssa employs Greek prepositions though that might be foremost on your mind at the moment. Instead, you're compelled to shift gears in order to meet folks when and where they are at. I might add that after such interaction you return to your *otium* refreshed, not sterile. That latter would be the case if you become fixed in your *otium* and see everything else as a challenge to it, a danger all monks face.

During the six and one half months of outlining Gregory's **Life of Moses** I had the usual interactions with my fellow monks, obviously more meaningful than this task. After all, they're the ones with whom I opted to live, so they deserve attention first. Encountering them on a daily basis precluded an ivory tower syndrom and kept my feet planted on the ground. In this context I apply the word "meaningful" relative to two elements. If one were absent (interacting with the monks), the other (making notations on the **Life**) wouldn't be valid and visa versa. This brings up an idea we hear a lot about, where and how do we obtain meaning. It might be better to re-phrase this as where and how do we obtain satisfaction in life, a slippery enterprise by any standard yet one which consumes a lot of our attention. It seems that when we enjoy a task at hand, regardless of what it is, we know instinctively this is where we belong, not elsewhere. The task may not be most the earth-shattering one around, not the point. That standard implies comparison and therefore competition with people, both inimical to the search for meaning. So how do we know when we've reached the point where we're supposed to be? That's the context in which I bring up the process of inserting Greek prepositions into a text, admittedly not everyone's ideal of fulfillment. Nevertheless, that task serves as a port of entry for exploring how we fit into a larger scheme of things which earlier I intimated within the context of background sounds. Over time we discover that when engaged in such a project, somehow it takes care of you, so it's a reciprocal relationship as opposed to being a one way street. More on how that comes about later. First we must a few words on meaningfulness.

Not long after I had gotten into this essay news reached us about the horrendous earthquake in Haiti and several weeks later, Chile. For several weeks afterwards images flooded the airwaves and media, bringing the tragedy right into our homes. After a few days exposure to this—and being in the monastery I'm grateful the exposure is limited—it made continuing with the essay appear a bit ridiculous; in other words, a waste of time. What wears on your nerves is that the attention given to a tragedy can make you loose your

peace of mind and losing this is of no value. Actually, the Haiti and Chile earthquakes are nothing new in history; what's new is the in-your-face exposure. In light of this still you have a life to live and deal with what's on your plate, even if it's as puny as inserting transliterated Greek words from a fourth century text. Here a danger lurks, of devaluing a task which is meaningful personally even if its other folks don't find it thus. When you come down to it, there are plenty of less desirable options. After a few days of being exposed to the incessant reporting about Haiti and Chile, I pondered more the relationship of meaningfulness which got this essay under way and saw how it related to maintaining one's peace of mind. Previously I hadn't seen the connection though implicitly knew there was one, that both go hand-in-hand. A sign of the latter was danger of drifting into being overwhelmed with images of suffering. Also a tacit assumption exists, that it's fashionable, if you will, to be worried about these issues.

Yet something extraordinary can spring from this vexation, quite difficult to articulate, which is what I'm trying to get at in this essay. Imagine being in a situation when everything around you is about to come crashing down. You may not be subject to the calamity at once but feel it can hit you any at moment hovering about you, ready to pounce. One example is being on a storm-tossed ship with a thin hull separating you from an infinite gush of water just outside. For the moment you're safe in a fragile environment with full knowledge that at any second water can come rushing in from all sides. Here's another example on a much more modest scale. Recently I was in church during the office of Vigils which begins 3.15 am. A fierce wind was blowing against the north side of the abbey church while we monks were snug inside chanting away. On both the hour and half hour the antique grandfather clock in the east cloister would chime, highlighting in a mysterious way the fragility of the monks' chant while the storm was raging outside. After Vigils I sat in the north cloister for a while enjoying the swirling snow, barely perceptible in the pre-dawn darkness, with only a half inch of plexiglass between it and me. I could touch this plexiglass and almost the storm, knowing full well that I was totally secure. Only about twenty feet away was that grandfather clock, so when it chimed at 5 am, its sharp tone echoed with special vibrancy not as a protest against the storm but as participating in it. While never had I been in danger, this fragility brought superb enjoyment, almost as though you're watching it unfold outside yourself as in a movie. Quite a different story, though, from those in Haiti and Chile. Nevertheless, this is a wonderful opportunity...privilege is more like it...to reflect on an experience which radiates outward (and how this radiance proceeds forever remains a mystery) to have a positive effect upon other people. One lesson I came away with is at least the experience just described is a dry run for the Real Thing should it ever occur. One could ask, from where comes this peace in the face of potential imminent dissolution? Is it recognition that we've reached the end of the line, or is it something else? Appreciation of this unusual situation requires putting some distance as well as time between it and you. It's a fairly common experience which resonates with people when the right occasion arises to share it and demands exploration to see what it consists of. One common denominator, however, is that many experiences of peace have their roots within trying circumstances, so it's more difficult nailing them down. Still, they leave a lasting impression. While it isn't desirable to live with threats looming over our heads all the time, we can distill the essence of our response to them and make it more present in our lives. We see the desirability of this attitude, the strength we gain in vulnerability, and want more of it. Yet wanting more of it is a recipe for never getting it because we're attempting to capture that which never can be captured. Apparently we're dealing with a state...a pre-condition of sorts...we carry around all the time which is activated more by impending catastrophe than by something good about to happen. Should we compare such a life-threatening experience with others, certainly it stands out; not because it's extraordinary but oddly enough we want more of it. And life's situations simply don't offer it (gratefully) which makes us experience listlessness, wishing for a form of excitement just beyond our reach. Such a wish, unfortunately, is the wrong place to look because never can it be satisfied.

If awareness of our mortality and its potential cessation is enlivening, can this heightened awareness be brought to fuller light and put into action more or less on a daily basis without bringing a genuine tragedy

down upon our heads? Yes, but a preconception holds us back: it whispers in our ears that to comport ourselves in such a manner means that we assume sufferings not unlike those of Job. If things don't turn out that drastic, still we're compelled to adopt a bleak outlook on life. There's something appealing about this, walking around with your head cast down, for it elicits sympathy both from God and persons about us. We may not be certain as to God's attitude towards us, but we can play on the feelings of people even if not done in a fully conscious manner. This attitude intimates that we're fated or pre-determined to act in such-and-such a way but not due to our choice: we are subject to tragedy due to the whim of the gods, very Greek-like. In essence there's satisfaction in walking about with things beyond our control, for it frees us up. In addition to garnering sympathy, it offers an outlook on life devoid of responsibility even if we happen to be doing some genuine suffering, physical, mental or spiritual (or all three at once). Such an attitude is relatively easy to discern in other persons but trickier in oneself. And so this fate, a willful submission to determinism, becomes something not unlike that "constant companion," the title of this essay. We now have a sense of purpose in life or meaning as noted above. At least we're not suffering alone but have fate or the gods on our side even if they're slaying us on a daily basis.

Getting back to my chief concern or the significance of real-life threatening situations...while they are swirling about us and occupying all our attention, we notice after a while that we can't do anything further. Insight into the significance of what's going on hits us yet we find it nigh impossible to explain. It's just there. Yet if we can slow down this process—usually it transpires within a few seconds—we find that we're stuck with something irreducible that won't go away regardless of our condition's severity. This turns out to be, for lack of a better term, a constant companion. The last paragraph described the opposite of this companion, its anti-twin, if I may put it like that. I call it such because both have the same constancy as far as the fact that both are present to us. And so despite which companion we happen to have, we can't get rid of them no matter how hard we try or try to deny their existence. Both are unknowable to us yet fully in our view, and usually they manifest themselves when we're on the verge of disaster. Turning attention to our positive companion, always it offers a way out of dramatic (and not so dramatic) events which confront us continuously. The exit strategy we're offered applies even if we end up being put to death, for our companion lives on and says that all is well. We're dealing with something fully beyond our control and subject neither to the laws of fate nor to the laws of determinism, today's favorite way of explaining away responsibility. So if this is our experience in stressing situations, could we designate this force at work as a someone? This is a bit tricky, for it makes us slide into conventional talk about God being personal or the like even though all about us we see evidence of impersonal forces at work. Even a fashionable word as trans-personal won't cut it, sounding too avant-garde or intellectual. The solution is easy. Go out into the field and try for yourself. This doesn't mean wishing for a thunderbolt on high to see if our "companion" will come to the rescue. The Jewish elders pulled a trick not unlike this on Calvary, and it didn't work.

When I say go out into the field and experiment I don't mean wishing for a piano to fall on your head but to see if awareness of this companion-thing begins to make itself felt. This isn't trying to act like a magician, for regardless of our situation, circumstances will present themselves favorable for its manifestation. What's important is our intent. Of course, we must bring a certain awareness based on faith that it works because the field where this trans-human companion is supposed to become manifest rarely looks promising, actually kind of bleak. That's because most of our lives are humdrum, and we project this humdrum-ness onto something where it cannot stick. Another approach, less threatening though just as challenging, is to set before our eyes an ignoble experience from the past. On occasion such memories do cloud our awareness, mostly against our will and to our embarrassment, but the goal is to sustain them in lively form. Surely we have plenty experiences on which to draw. This isn't an exercise of self-flagellation but of grounding oneself in reality, in short, of cultivating humility. After abiding in such an awareness, do we find that the companion shows up? Yes though perhaps not as immediately as in a genuine life-threatening situation as already described. In this less threatening instance we should avoid using our negative experiences as a means of conjuring up a spirit. That's an ever present temptation and

good to get out there at the beginning so we won't fall into it. As far as this companion goes—regardless of how it manifests itself—another way of perceiving it may be through our conscience. After all, “conscience” is derived from the Latin to know together, implying the sharing of knowledge between two persons. Only in the case at hand the other person who partakes of knowing is the invisible companion. Conscience does not apply to knowing as a subject knows an object or a body of knowledge. Rather, it is a type of observing...of beholding...that which is going on both inside and outside us while the observer is detached from them both. Defined thus, we seem to be close to a definition of contemplative prayer abstracted from the more devotional slants attached to it.

Here's a concrete example of what I'm attempting to convey by using the phrase “constant companion.” In the monastery we have an elderly brother, a World War II vet, who had been a fireman. As we all know, that profession involves about 5% terror and 95% boredom or hanging around the firehouse. This monk, like a number of retired firemen I had met over the years, has a peculiar ability to mark time. It's a trait carried over from being on active duty for most of one's life and like many other traits, has become a natural way of comporting oneself. Even before he retired, this monk hung around various places in the community. He stood out because of this, a bit difficult for most of his fellow monks to comprehend, for like most non-firemen, they were intent on getting from point A to point B. Not that he was bothersome nor in the way—far from it—but he seemed a bit awkward, out of place, by reason of standing here or sitting there, always in the thick of things yet removed from them. Yet if you looked more deeply, this fellow, fireman that he was, always was ready to spring into action at a moment's notice. Always he was “on duty.” You could just feel it when in his presence, and that trait endeared him because often he was first on the scene when someone needed a helping hand. Yet most of the time his fellow monks were going about their business. You could see them bumping up against this monk like a rock, tree or the way water does not merely bump up against a small island but flows around it, resuming its course on the other end. For most, he was an island of calm and readiness you'd meet along the way. If you stopped to chat a bit, quickly you'd find yourself put into your proper place, of finding that you've been taking your work too seriously. This didn't come from him directly but from the awareness of your present situation that somehow hit you. Such was the impression from most monks when they exchanged a few words before moving on. More than a few were annoyed slightly, so a quick way out of this was to smile and continue their way. And so his fellow monks related to him on the run, never pausing long enough to partake of his unique vision. In fact, I'd be hard pressed to find someone who knew this fellow on a more intimate basis apart from the usual salutations. Folks like this have time on their hands. In fact, they were born this way. Not that they're lazy or bored but have found their niche right out their in public while maintaining their personal island of integrity. You don't appreciate them while they are living in our midst but only when they have passed off the scene. As an observant monk noted, these are the ones we remember long after the “important” members of the community have left their mark and have died. In short, this witness of being in the middle of community activity while giving the appearance of standing apart from it is not that common and makes its mark felt over the long haul. A sure sign of such a person's impact is that a hole within the community has opened up once he has died (fortunately not yet the case with our brother fireman).

Could we describe our “constant companion” along similar lines? Some parallels do exist which is why this retired monk-fireman has come to mind. Although I just intimated that other monks who occupy lowly positions are the ones best remembered after death, our friend here offers a more singular model. Should anyone approach this fellow and ask him to explain his witness, chances are he wouldn't have a clue. He'd simply go on his way unaffected by our praise. Thus the witness acquired and nurtured over a long period of time is unconscious to the one bearing it but fully conscious to those around him. That's a sign the witness is genuine. Self-reflection is absent. As for the inner disposition which brought such a person to this place, chances are high somewhere along the line he became alienated. That might sound a bit too strong but often is the case with those who stand out by reason of their positive witness. The alienation

may be unknown to those about him, but monastic experience reveals that almost always it lays behind a trait we intuit as positive. This may sound scandalous but is true, for always the monastery has been a battle ground with respect to the spiritual life. In the case at hand, a long period of maladjustment had followed some personal trauma, and we have no right to ask what it was. All we're interested here is a pattern which had emerged after observing quite a few monks over an extended period of time. Although this happens in monasteries as well as in the "world," by reason of the juxtaposition of close-quarter living and hours of solitude belonging to monastic life. One is more vulnerable to a traumatic experience and its off shoots. The overall silence and confinement of the enclosure make it more difficult to deal with past hurts. Thus the recovery period may be longer since monks have much less distractions. After all, monks harbor resentment and hurts just like anyone else. And so this wounded person walks around while his trauma grows in secret until in some way or another it bursts out into the open for all to behold. Now a period of post-traumatic humiliation sets in, if you will, which is the long term effect.

I'd say this post-traumatic period is worse because the monk lives with the fact that his brothers know first-hand about his personal humiliations. Being with them day by day makes it hard to conceal them. The only remedy is to posit some distance between the original hurt and the present moment, even if attempts to cultivate awareness of that present is elusive. Still, the effort will pay off eventually. It means the monk should have faith in the healing dynamic quietly at work which remains invisible yet active. It doesn't bring about a dramatic solution such as eliminating the humiliation but situates the monk in a position otherwise might never have come to mind. And that position is not unlike the fireman-monk who, unbeknownst to him, ends up like an island around which everyone so busily flows. As said above, should you ask him why he behaves as he does, he'd look right at you without having a clue as how to answer. Somehow this state borders on that of perfection, odd as that may sound. Every conceivable humiliation or pain—not that one is oblivious to them—fades in comparison. While you can't predict the future, in this special instance you do have a glimpse into what it holds, and certainty as to being immune to greater traumas coming down the road is what you perceive even if it's in a dim fashion.

Originally I had set out intending to jot down some thoughts about that so-called constant companion as viewed from the monastic context. As I tried to show, it's misleading to consider this companion in strictly human terms. The same error can apply to perceiving it as an impersonal force, a view most people would tend toward because of the overwhelming evidence of im-personality at work in the universe. Like most things, our "constant companion" falls somewhere in between the personal and impersonal; better to say it's neither, hence the mystery which enshrouds it. When I shared some of this essay with a fellow monk, especially the part centering upon our fellow monk-fireman, he liked it and added wryly, "They don't teach you this in the novitiate!" How true. You look at the younger monks, almost as a combat veteran does rookies, and wonder if they'll survive...how they'll adapt...to what's in store for them down the road. I should note that as this essay developed, the physical condition of the fireman-monk deteriorated further though he continues to get around. That means we must hang around him as much as possible to soak up his wisdom even if it isn't taught verbally but through example. At least one can flow around his stationary presence like that rock in the midst of a stream.

So if we perceive this "constant companion," somehow we must relate to it. This brings up the element of relationship which has social, ethical and religious elements rolled into one. The difficulty here compared with relating to a regular human being is that we don't have this companion in front of us but within us. That means we can't imagine (in the sense of positing an image of an invisible person) this companion in terms of a flesh-and-blood person, a temptation more subtle than imagined. And if we say the companion is within us, that gets tricky. Are we deluding ourselves by adopting a fabrication in an effort to console ourselves? That to which we're relating interiorly isn't even an object, no matter how ethereal we might conceive it. In light of this slipperiness we're compelled to seek some type of working relationship. We should be careful asking people for advice in this regard, keeping input to a minimum. However, if people

knew in truth that such an interior relationship existed, literally they would give their lives for it without the slightest hesitation. Actually most of us have an inkling in one way or another yet few know how to articulate it simply because as with human relationships, they haven't bothered to cultivate them. So we need to give considerable thought to the project and look around for real-life examples and see how these people comport themselves. Such examples are hidden and need to be sought out carefully, for like anything invisible, our quest is, well, for that which is invisible. That means adapting ourselves for a task you don't hear much talk about. Paradoxically, one requirement is not to seek actively for such a person but give up on it. Once this is done, something amazing happens in a relatively short time. The right person...and it might be a complete stranger...suddenly comes on the scene not unlike the prophetess Anna "coming up at that very hour" [Lk 2.38].

Crucial as a trusty advisor may be, we must go forward with our search pretty much on our own. In the end our exploration is a solitary one, for as said above (and this point can't be stressed enough), our "constant companion" is invisible and that means it is transcendent, beyond anyone or anything we may imagine. When speaking like this, legitimately one can ask how (or even if) such a search can be undertaken. The claim to legitimacy does not rest with personal opinion but looking into human nature and seeing its dire poverty which makes us strive perpetually for something better. This is a sign we're on the right track because examining our innate poverty is inherently repulsive, especially for modern man. At the same time it's appealing because we are dealing with the truth. Distilling this process of discovery a bit further, quickly we find that the desire itself to set out on this path is our sole guiding light. It's more than a simple urge but a deep-down burn from within, and we're unable to explain it adequately to people let alone ourselves. Everyone has it, all right, but are at a loss as how to approach it. Nevertheless, our desire seems tailor-made for this "constant companion" and drops a hint of its presence here and there, much on the sly, but enough to keep us going. It does so even when confronted with arguments and "proofs" as to its non-existence which, to the seeker, are simply obstacles to be brushed aside. Here's an amazing point. The time apart from this contact constitutes 99.99% of our lives, so we're talking about a contact as fleeting as one could imagine. Instead of being discouraged at the staggering waste of time and resources we spend with this 99.99% of our lives, it turns out to be a drop in the buck compared with the .01% of time we spend with our "conscious companion." These numbers aren't an exaggeration but true to anyone who has had the experience. We can't produce evidence of this contact but know it to be true because our desire has been satisfied. Fortunately as time passes our companion quietly and imperceptibly transmits its form into our awareness, making us more consistent with its reality. While this is transpiring, something very important is going on at the same time. The way we comport ourselves makes a shift which means that all aspects of our lives get in harmony, resulting in becoming more mellow. Here is the evidence we've been looking for, a life-change for the best.

So what is this mellowness which results from our new way of comporting ourselves? Firstly, it isn't a manifestation of our "constant companion" per se but the effects of abiding in its shadow where it reveals itself directly more to those around us, not to ourselves. People can't help but stop and take notice. They're bound to offer a favorable impression as to the new way we comport ourselves, an observation which affirms the dynamic transpiring within. Should we continue along this path, the stage is set for hitting upon a trusted (human) companion with whom to share our adventure. This is a discovery, pretty much a sure-fire thing, as opposed to engaging in an active search for such a person. Apart from this one-on-one contact and the favorable observations from people around us, where can we find a more universal confirmation that we've acquired this mellowness? We'd like to see it described somewhere in literature or in a living tradition with a venerable history in order to confirm our own experience. Desire for this confirmation parallels that for discovering a trusted human companion. That is, we two tried and true ways do exist right lying at the heart of Western civilization, the practice of Christian virtue known as *arete* and the Greek way of comporting oneself within a *polis* or city-state. *Sophrosune* is the term for this comportment. Because of its importance, I garnered several passages from both the **Dialogues** of Plato

and the writings of Gregory of Nyssa, two authors from whom often I've cited on the Home Page. Actually, *arete* was developed first by the Greeks and taken over by Christians who put their own stamp on it. This noun refers to the best quality in anything, one that stands out by reason of its attractiveness. I had dealt with it on several occasions in the Home Page as in The Importance of Kata, so more detailed information may be found there.

When we hear about the practice of virtue, a range of emotions, even shame, falls upon us chiefly because we have mis-informed notions about it. Some of these notions have become popularized over time in the form of less than desirable images which stick in our minds and distort the reality in front of us. Part of the reason is that virtue had been perceived as a Stoic attitude (and this too is mis-informed), an inner grittiness or stiff upper-lip when confronted with unfavorable circumstances. Furthermore, virtue is relegated to the saints whose lives are way beyond anything we dare attain. They simply do not live the same type of lives we do. When confronted with something totally beyond our attainment, the best we can hope for is a kind of middle ground. At the same time that leaves us with regret, at being unsatisfied for not having striven more vigorously. And so, something of a cross between a pious saint and a gaunt Stoic sage is the image we end up with. The practice of virtue thus is clouded by a whole array of misunderstandings that only a close, healthy examination of tradition can expunge. This gets back to a theme running through many essays on this Home Page, namely, the wonderful affiliation between the classical and Christian traditions that became lost over time. In a sense, one tradition can't stand alone...even the Christian one...without suffering impoverishment. That may sound a bit heterodox but turns out to have some truth to it once the mists separating us and the early Christian centuries have been lifted, even if just a bit. A prime example of this harmonious interaction is that early on Christians took over the concept of *arete* as the best quality of anything. One could call it an ideal where human actions are paramount and other concerns are secondary. And so *arete* is the best feature of anything of anyone and did not necessarily tie in with virtue as a specifically human endowment perceived in terms of moral excellence.

To look for that which has *arete* (*aristos* is the adjective from which we get 'aristocracy') implies that you have an ideal which someone or something intimates, and to which we're attracted immediately. So if we're walking around with an attitude always looking for that which is best, we can succumb to being deluded with this unnatural pull between the ideal and the real. However, such was not the issue as presented among the ancient Greeks. Yet today it's easy to see how people view Plato's philosophy along this line, as a search for reality in some ethereal realm while denigrating the nitty-gritty world. And so looking for *arete* comes freighted with quite a lot of mis-perceptions for us moderns, that it's too abstract. It makes us run the risk of becoming neurotic by the contrast between two extremes: the imperfect copy we experience daily versus the real existence of the original to which the bulk of our attention should be directed. Such a misunderstanding can be dispensed with quickly if we consider the word *eidos* which Plato uses for "form." It's important because therein consists much of the confusion and turn-off we feel nowadays. *Eidos* comes from the verbal root *eido*, to behold in the sense of taking in everything with a single glance. It implies the whole as well as a tendency towards that whole... "tendency towards" being two crucial words. After all, the visual implications of *eido* suggest distance between the see-er and the seen, a gap which we bridge as observers, not participants. And so *eidos* and *arete* are not unlike each other. In other words, we have an *eidos* of *arete* wherever we find it: the latter reflects upon the former, giving it value. This little distinction goes a long way to appreciate better *arete* as being the most excellent quality in anyone or in anything. Instead of judging people and things as to how they stack up with regard to excellency, we shift attention to see movement towards this excellency. Thus the pressure is taken off. The movement may be little or a lot; regardless, emphasis is upon movement, not remaining static. We may think this pressure to achieve excellency is common to us only, but it was just as intense in ancient times when people on occasion would content...fight...for that which has *arete*. Still, the notion of *arete* as a tending-toward-which is one of those things that has universal appeal and is perfectly valid for us now as it was for the ancient Greeks.

It was natural for early Christians raised in a Hellenistic culture to adopt the notion of *arete* to their religious beliefs since it went back at least to Homer. Of course, that adoption was applied to the person of Jesus Christ whose life embodied those qualities which, as it were, tended toward the best (*aristos*). Obviously such tending-toward relative to Jesus as a paragon of virtue pertained to his relationship with the Father; after all, constantly Jesus referred to his Father without whom he could do nothing. Thus attributing *arete* exclusively to Jesus lifted it to a wholly new level from the Greek one. Still, Jesus Christ was perceived as equivalent to the Good, the Beautiful and the Truth, all qualities embodying the reality toward-which *arete* inclined. In both instances, the Greek and Christian ones, *arete* essentially had the same goal as far as practice went. That gave the early understanding of *arete* a certain flexibility and openness regarding its implementation, a view which we can apply today instead of seeing virtue as an undesirable task. Emphasis remained upon directing aright the desire for *arete*, of keeping it constantly directed there in order to assume more of its form...its *eidōs*...a term noted in the last paragraph. Not only was *arete* understood as finding fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ, it was considered an adornment...a *komos*...not unlike a garment to reflect its beauty from the person so endowed. All one has to do is read, for example, Gregory of Nyssa's **Song Commentary** to pick this up: "Since the life of virtue is neither uniform nor the same, it is like the art of skillfully making a garment by weaving various threads" [J.271]. Here the term for "life" is *politeia*, not simply biological existence but the condition and rights of a citizen as found within a city-state or *polis*. Thus not only is *arete* to be found in Jesus Christ nor the Christian person but just as importantly, in the way he conducts himself within the *polis*, if you will, of the Church.

This element of *politeia* is quite helpful insofar as it contains both personal and social modes of comportment. After all, from it derives our word "polite" (as well as 'police') which fundamentally means how we behave in the company of people. Such a two-fold manner of comportment becomes more desirable when we take a look at its roots in Plato's works, for example (the **Republic** especially comes to mind). From that vantage point we can see his influence upon early Christianity. One could argue persuasively that it is more realistic, if you will than the practice of virtue in the Christian sense or at least the way this practice has been transmitted. Part of the reason is that accent is on the positive and communal as opposed to the solitary approach often associated with Christian practice which stressed the relationship between God and the soul. Having the right to speak in public made you known to all within the small dimensions of a *polis*. These limitations, in turn, were connected with the innate Greek abhorrence for the infinite. Certainly all inhabitants of the Hellenistic world weren't model citizens, yet the notion of *politeia* was strong enough that it permeated society. Responsibility fell upon the aristocrats...those who were supposed to embody that which was *aristos*...to filter down an obligation of how to comport oneself within the limited sphere of *politeia*. That class (at least idealistically) had a well-developed consciousness of itself plus legitimate duties in relations to others, ambitions, social standing and expectations. When dealing with other classes, the *aristoi* were inclined in principle to see that which was *arete* among them and to raise it up to their level. It might sound condescending today but retains some validity...certainly competitive with respect to how Christian virtue has been presented.

So what is the defining trait of an aristocrat, of one who embodies that which is *aristos*? Does it mean that most of us, not belonging to that class, are out of luck? No, because aristocracy is out of fashion. We're living in a society which has become leveled, a state of affairs which over the long term is more debilitating than the drawbacks of a hierarchical society. To flesh out what it means to be an *aristos*, one who is committed to *arete*, I introduce another Greek term, *sophrosune*, which ties in with *arete* as a tendency to search out the best in anyone or anything. *Sophrosune* is difficult to translate adequately compared with the other Greek terms which have been introduced, so some unpacking is required. Because *arete* and *sophrosune* aren't practiced in isolation but within the *polis*, both have a social context. Before their manifestation within the *polis*, they have to be apparent within oneself. I might add even before this they seem to have a life all their own. What exactly does this mean? We're getting in an unfamiliar realm, one that smacks of the transcendent, where in the final analysis *sophrosune* is characteristic of that "constant

companion,” the subject of this essay. So it appears this companion teaches us interiorly how to be *sophronos* both as an individual and as a member of the *polis*. Earlier I had outlined the shift from the Hellenistic concept of *arete* to the Christian one or better, to Jesus Christ. Thus it seems natural to attribute him as being this “constant companion.” While true theologically, there remains the awkward problem of perceiving Jesus as an invisible person within yet apart from us, a ghost within the machine. Various strains of mysticism have wrestled with this issue yet boil down to our inability to grasp it. The only graceful way out is by surrendering to ignorance regarding the matter. That doesn’t mean surrendering in the conventional sense, of giving up, but of recognizing our limitations, a hard thing to do nowadays. Perhaps that’s where *arete* and now *sophrosune* can help us wiggle out of this situation, if you will. As for *sophrosune* proper, its connotation of prudence and moderation as representing the highest ideal in Greek thought is impossible to translate fully with any single Greek word. It’s complex meaning, so important to the ancients, perhaps is expressed best by the two most famous sayings of the oracle at Delphi: “Nothing in excess” and “Know thyself.” *Sophrosune* suggests a life-long happiness obtained when one’s philosophical needs are satisfied, resembling the idea of enlightenment through harmonious living. It is a nearly lost classical ideal but has modern appeal insofar as its emphasis upon individuals living within the proportions of reason and nature. Such a desired state of affairs is achieved through practical wisdom and self knowledge. *Sophrosune* thus suggests a kind of order or balance that stretches from the innermost reaches of the soul to the surface of the body and on to the way that body moves and what the whole person does. *Sophrosune* is a grace and a goodness that comes from self-possession, and it is in this sense that it is characteristic of whatever is *aristos* and hence whatever belongs to the aristocracy.

The way of comporting oneself properly both in private and in public as signified by the word *sophrosune* and its preference for excellency (*arete*) is helpful for laying the groundwork, if you will, to see whether this “constant companion” does exist or is simply a figment of our imagination, our image-making machine. Yet even before we get into that, the way to check if *sophrosune* itself is simply a mental concoction is to employ the simplest and most reliable rule around, “by their fruits you shall know them.” The soundness (or lack of it) of one’s life will provide an automatic proof as to its validity. Actually, the more you consider *sophrosune* the more you see it as characteristic of older persons...not always true but true enough to indicate *sophrosune* as that which tends toward the acquisition of wisdom throughout a life time. So if we keep this comparison in mind and consider the way an older person comports himself by showing himself more self-contained, we get someone like that monk-fireman spoken of earlier. In essence this means the description of our “constant companion” which started out this essay has undergone substantial modification which is okay. Such a thought has been rummaging around in my mind, that our desire for company...to share life with someone...starts out naturally enough concerning another person. Most folks run with this their entire lives, a natural impulse, yet real life experience demonstrates that it’s fraught with difficulties. Then if your experience has been negative (often the case) you lick your wounds and become mellow. After a while it dawns on you that life isn’t so bad when I can’t share it intimately with a flesh-and-blood person. So if you stick with this general sentiment a bit, you discover that all along you’ve had the right equipment to be alone with this “constant companion.” All your *arete*...your striving for excellency...has been in this direction, so here you are with it in your lap where it was right from the beginning. You discover that all over again you have to establish a completely new *modus vivendi* as far as relating with people, only this time you start from a position of strength. Earlier you ran the course of getting into normal human relationships and flubbed it up (again, usually the case). Now you’ve learned the hard way and had to fall back upon your own resources, always a tricky venture, yet have survived the process and came out bruised but renewed. While you may have in memory the pattern of earlier human relationships, you prefer not to replicate it yet can’t help but follow its general outline simply because that’s how we are made. Now what had been learned painfully out in the field has become interiorized and purified. Without falling into the mistake of thinking we are engaged in some subliminal unconscious exchange or the like, the familiar pattern of human relationships proves to be a forerunner for the territory we’re about to enter, the one for which always we had an inkling. Even more wonderfully, this inkling

starts to come into its own, and earlier hesitations of assenting to its reality begin to fade away. Interestingly, what we had taken as reality...as being so hard and undeniably real...starts to assume a shadowy existence.

This is a hard, even awkward topic, to articulate for many reasons; despite the difficulties, it's worth pursuing because it may be applied to a variety of life styles and conditions. One application is the monastic whose unique vantage point is that it allows for greater opportunities for reflection which are not temporary but continue throughout a lifetime. Like anyone else, a monk is moved by a desire for companionship, becomes disillusioned with it and comes to a place...hopefully a blessed place...where he has learned lessons from his disillusionment. Finally, after having been battered around (and this seems to be a major requirement), we hit upon a self-contained contentment that had eluded us all our lives. No longer does one have to strive after excellency or *arete* because he has achieved its essence along with, of course, *sophrosune* which has been growing quietly and imperceptibly. Perhaps in the back of our minds lies the idea that yes, human relationships are trying, and like the lottery, we may win big. In both instances the statistics for success are dismally low. Nevertheless, the grip that a perfect relationship has over us is frightfully powerful and needs to be loosened. Once it does (again, usually through disillusionment) we discover a reality we know instinctively is the one we've been striving for all our lives. Not only that, the formidable evidence against it, so eagerly and persuasively argued, turns out to be a phantom. Again, to discover whether or not this is true, go out in the field and try it. Then bounce off your results with someone else, preferably someone with a similar experience, and see if that person is living in a manner characterized by *sophrosune*. Really, despite the wonderful conveniences of modern life, cultivating *sophrosune* or being in the presence of one who is *sophronos* is the most important and rewarding venture.

So I've attempted to describe the nature of this "constant companion," the phrase being a personal invention with which I'm not satisfied entirely but decided to retain. As noted in the first paragraph, I had spent three of the four seasons making notations to Gregory of Nyssa's **Life of Moses**, a time consuming task which sometimes made me wonder if I was wasting my time, plain and simple. Yet as one season flowed into another, somewhere in the background I felt a presence, a being-with-someone or something as I trudged along. Actually I wasn't pre-occupied with analyzing it but abiding in its presence. At first I thought it was a figment of my imagination, of having come from prolonged exposure to the same task done in relative isolation. The evidence that something larger than I was present—and realization came much later—was that I felt a growing infusion of what could be described only as *sophrosune*. Infusion is a good word, not unlike a new supply of blood entering your system. Since it had a personal quality yet obviously wasn't a flesh-and-blood person and continued to be present as much as I averted to it, I dubbed it "constant companion." As the article progressed, I became less satisfied with the title but did not abandon it, being representative of an original inspiration to jot down thoughts. Knowledge of this "constant companion" is the goal, of achieving contentment whether we're alone or in the company of another person. Usually we start off with a keen self-awareness often marked by selfishness. Then it loosens up through the practice of *sophrosune* gained chiefly by imitating those persons who are *sophismoi* or persons who've tried their hand at *sophrosune* and have succeeded. At each stage the process is aided by appeal to our innate desire for excellency...*arete*...as manifested in people and things. This desire is neutral. By that I mean it is subject neither to increase nor to decrease nor to both. It just sits there, kind of passive but not passive like an inanimate object. Because of this we shouldn't view going from a lack of *sophrosune/arete* to advancing further to a deeper stage. This has validity for discussion purposes yet fails to grasp what's really going on. Regardless of where we're at—just starting out or have been at it for some years—emphasis is upon excellency itself. It doesn't matter whether now we have a little more *arete* compared with, say, six months ago. Delight in excellency in and by itself is the task at hand. While this may be recognized intellectually, it's another thing to put into practice. Throughout the process (and who is qualified to say when it stops?) there occurs a loosening of one's personality in favor of a more general, comprehensive awareness. Of course, regresses happen; despite them, generally the movement is toward

this greater comprehensiveness.

Towards concluding this essay I had a phone conversation with a good friend in Iceland who said that in the “world” it’s virtually impossible to live in God’s presence. I retorted with some dread, if that’s true, how lucky we are in the monastery where this practice is far from being easy. The major advantage is that we don’t have to deal with countless distractions. Then I mentioned to him if we’re dealing with some mental fabrication when it comes to God, best to expel from our lives. It might work, but we were both too chicken to try it out. Perhaps cultural conditioning has a lot to do with this thing about God; to deny God would be denying our culture, the milieu in which we had been raised. Yet this essay remains an appeal to experiment on one’s own, to go out in the field and work it out. If it fails, at least we know the results. Solitude appears to be the prime requisite for awareness of this “constant companion.” This appeal to experience had its echo with me or during that extended period of making entries relative to the **Life of Moses** project. The time spent alone in concentrated work became a part of entry for this real but indefinable presence which made itself felt more and more, clearly not a personal fabrication. By necessity it starts off discreetly in solitude because we are too weak to see it all at once or face to face, to borrow an expression from Exodus. Some sensitivity to being alone is required to put a damper upon all the mental activity going on in our heads. Only then does it adapt according to the mode of life we have chosen (in my case it’s the monastic one). This process evades description, really, yet we can say that it smooths out over time. Our “constant companion” at first is bound to encounter quite a few rough edges stemming from own lives, yet over time they diminish until this smoothness takes over. It doesn’t sound attractive, actually quite boring, but is not the case. Rather, such boringness is symptomatic of our rough edges and of being unfamiliar with the nature of what’s transpiring in relative secrecy. Another way of putting it is that the more you get to know this “constant companion,” the more you assume its smoothness and become invisible. I’d rather use the word hidden since that implies a presence just as valid as one that is not manifest. At the same time a paradox is forming here. Smoothness, an important feature under discussion, at the same time is flat as a pancake and right out there for everyone to behold. Yet there’s nothing initially attractive about a flat plain. To contradict this to a degree, a trip through western Nebraska several years ago retains a hold on my memory compared with other parts of the country. In that state I veered off the interstate most of the time to experience the vastness of the land. In many places it was as flat as Iowa but flatter, as it were, by reason of prairie instead of the busyness of corn fields and hence to me was more natural. All you had to do was get out of the car and stand there caught between heaven and earth. Of course, this is a familiar experience to other travelers and more so for the early pioneers, not unlike the one people have on a ship in the middle of the ocean. Maybe the latter is more accurate because it has a tinge of danger, of being sunk. In Nebraska at least you can get out and walk around.

Whether in western Nebraska or the central Pacific, another feature of this vastness is not being lost in the sense of losing one’s identity. Rather, one prefers to be so lost and remain that way. Under a similar condition as this our “constant companion” awakes and comes to our aide in order to keep us hidden. Actually that might be our first real encounter, the one our “constant companion” has in mind for us, yet we haven’t been so disposed to appreciate it. Now at long last communication is established, and once it is, we’re on the correct path. How do we know this to be true? Actually there’s no proof in the conventional sense; desire for it is not unlike reverting from the smoothness just delineated to our former “rough” surface. It is precisely here in this “smooth” realm we experience a new dimension of reality which is so under-appreciated that people prefer to dismiss it as non-existence or as pure nonsense. Nevertheless, we’re impelled to give an account because despite scepticism and ridicule, everyone would give an arm and a leg for it should they be convinced of this reality. One way of going about this comes from a few basic principles I first encountered some seventeen years ago in Ken Wilbur’s book, **Eye to Eye** (the subtitle reads, *The Quest for the New Paradigm*). In brief, **Eye** lists the painful disjunction of disciplines within the West, the most obvious one between science and religion. Within a given discipline (biology, for example)

those persons who've attained the same expertise can converse with each other freely. Naturally they have no need either to speak up or to speak down. They embody the essence of Wilbur's title as speaking on the same level playing field, eye-to-eye. Not only are the participants sharing knowledge but are enjoying each other's company and hence are killing two birds for one stone. Unfortunately the situation is different when it comes to a scientist speaking with a representative from a mainstream religion, Christianity being in the forefront when it comes to these issues. One could argue in a sarcastic vein that even Christian religionists can't speak eye-to-eye. The big question is, can experts in a given branch of knowledge speak eye-to-eye with experts in another? To date the dialogue (actually, more of a parody of a dialogue) between science and religion has not gotten to the level of eye-to-eye. It's more like speaking eye-to-foot or foot-to-eye, no commonality whatsoever. With the rise of interest in spirituality some people have seen the limitations of religion as a formal entity and have delved deeper within themselves and their tradition to see if they can find anything there. To their surprise and delight, they discovered an innate maturity which enabled them to share experiences across religious and cultural borders. That is terrific news for getting religious folks to speak with those from other religions on the eye-to-eye level. However, when it comes to other fields of human endeavor some creative thinking is in order, and here I don't pretend to have an answer except point in that direction. This yet to be discovered field is worth pursuing for a person who has cultivated a relationship with his "constant companion" because he has the vantage point of seeing that it isn't alien to other fields of human endeavor. Somehow he intuits a unity in plurality and plurality in unity, to use an expression which runs the risk of being trite.

One could argue that such ideas are intended to replace traditional talk of heaven and the like. Hard to tell really, yet traditional images continue to pop up in our collective culture despite our secular environment. In most cultures heaven is "up there" in the sky whose perfect smoothness arches over the bumpy surface of the earth. Most of us want to know how to get from here to there which implies that we have somewhere within us a memory of "up there." This is very Plato-like, reminiscent of his theory of *anamnesis*, recollection as the foundation for knowledge. Be that as it me, the problem is how to effect this recollection. As we know from most literature, "there's no there;" the language is symbolic, kind of Zen-like, which appeals to some yet turns others off. Because of this inadequacy of expression and to counter that fear of modern ways of speaking replacing traditional talk about heaven and the like, again I make appeal to our Graeco-Roman heritage, some of it being represented in the *sophrosune* references below. Without that grounding, (Christian) religion devolves into piety and dogma. The major problem with that heritage is that it wasn't viewed through the eye of the spirit (à la Ken Wilbur) but through the eye of the intellect which is still considered the most developed "eye" we have. Reams of literature have spun off from that perspective creating thick layers of insulation between that heritage and us lies. The major problem is that it had not been presented from the vantage point of a person or school of thought which has seen "eye to eye" with it; only the eye of the intellect had been favored to the detriment of the eye of the spirit which for the most part either withered or never was developed adequately. Perhaps those person who have abandoned Christianity did so not as a rejection but because of this "eye" issue. Even though Wilbur has provided a helpful tool, the fruit of its application remains to be seen, simply because the intellectual eye has dominated for so long. Not only has it stifled grown of the spiritual eye, but more importantly never allowed the eye of one's emotional life to mature, a prerequisite for the other two eyes, the one of intellect and spirit. To speak of that is not the place here in this essay, so we'll leave it at that.

To sum up a bit with regard to our "constant companion," I make recourse to the Council of Chalcedon (451) noted in an earlier article. In brief, Chalcedon has as its profession of faith the one person of Jesus Christ in two separate natures, human and divine. Those familiar with Christian doctrine and history have heard this repeated in one form or another, so much that we don't bother reflecting upon it. Obviously we're dealing with the mystery of the Incarnate Lord which transcends our ability to grasp him. As for ourselves, we're so used to carrying around one person with one nature that rarely has it dawned upon us to consider what it'd be like being one person with two natures. Obviously impossible and a even bit

freaky which makes it easier to sympathize with those who rejected Chalcedon's teaching. However, it remains within our imagination to project what this may be like, being one person with two natures. One prerequisite is to perceive the divine nature for what it is, that never can it be described nor known...which doesn't mean that it does not exist. We get the impression that repetition of dogmas and pronouncements relative to Christian doctrine in this regard means knowledge about the divine nature. Far from it. Keeping in mind Wilbur's insight, the divine does not come into alignment with the eye of the intellect but with that of the spirit which, as noted already, has been in a sorry state for many years. Yet we can imagine being one person with two natures. To begin with, already we are one person and one nature. All we have to do is "add" another nature, the divine one. That means fostering awareness of what we do not know, of abiding in that ignorance, and after acquainting ourselves with it, "hook it up with" our human nature. Thus we can walk around as one person with two natures, if you will. We do so by imagination and not by reality. If we did the former, soon other people would take notice and call the authorities. In the article before this I had proposed this as an experiment based upon pretending, one you can perform readily provided you accept the divinity as a bona fide reality or in the context of this essay, align your spiritual eye with the eye of Jesus Christ as true God and true man. Thus we have what it means to live by the faith handed down to us by the Council of Chalcedon.

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Sophrosune in Plato

Phaedo

-And the quality of *moderation* which even the majority call by that name, that is, not to get swept off one's feet by one's passions, but to treat them with disdain and orderliness, is this not suited only to those who most of all despise the body and live the life of philosophy? 68.c9

-The happiest of these, who will also have the best destination, are those who have practiced popular and social virtue, which they call *moderation* and justice and which was developed by habit and practice, without philosophy or understanding? 82.b1

Phaedo

-That is the reason why a man should be of good cheer about his own soul, if during life he has ignored the pleasures of the body and its ornamentation as of no concern to him and doing him more harm than good, but has seriously concerned himself with the pleasures of learning and adorned his soul not with alien but with its own ornaments, namely, *moderation*, righteousness, courage, freed and truth, and in that state awaits his journey to the underworld. 114.e5

Symposium

-For *moderation*, by common agreement, is power over pleasures and passions, and no pleasure is more powerful than Love!...and because he has power over pleasures and passions, Love is exceptionally moderate. 196.c3

-But by far the great est and most beautiful part of wisdom deals with the proper ordering of cities and households, and that is called *moderation* and justice. 209.a8

Phaedrus

-Now when judgment is in control and leads us by reasoning toward what is best, that sort of *self-control* is called 'being in your right mind;' but when desire takes command in us and drags us without reasoning toward pleasure, then its command is known as 'outrageousness.' 237.e3

-He has made a change and installed a new ruling government in himself: *right-minded* reason in place of the madness of love. 241.a3

-Justice and *self-control* do not shine out through their images down here, and neither do the other objects of the soul's admiration; the senses are so murky that only a few people are able to make out with difficulty the original of the likeness they encounter here. 250.b2

Alcibiades

-If being *self-controlled* is knowing yourself, then their skills don't make any of them *self-controlled*. 131.b4

Charmides (Plato's dialogue devoted to temperance)

-And the soul is cured by means of certain charms, and these charms consist of beautiful words. It is a result of such words that temperance arises in the soul, and when the soul acquires and possesses *temperance*, it is easy to provide health both for the head and for the rest of the body. 157.a6

-In his opinion *temperance* was doing everything in an orderly and quiet way—things like walking in the streets and talking and doing everything else in a similar fashion. 159.b2

-*Temperance* seems to me to make people ashamed and bashful, and so I think modesty must be what *temperance* really is. 160.e3

-I have remembered having heard someone say that *temperance* is minding one's own business. 161.b4

-If knowing is what *temperance* is, then clearly it must be some sort of science and must be of something, isn't that so? 165.c5

-By means of temperance, every household would be well-run, and every city well-governed, and so in every case where *temperance* reigned. 171.e5

-Isn't this what we mean about *temperance*, Critias, when we say what a good thing it would be to know what one knows and what ones does not know? 172.a4

-Let us even agree that the mantic art is knowledge of what is to be and that *temperance*, directing her, keeps away deceivers and sets up the true seers as prophets of the future. I grant that the human race, if thus equipped, would act and live in a scientific way—because temperance, watching over it, would not allow the absence of science to creep in and become our accomplice. 173.c4

Protagoras

-Justice and *temperance* and piety—what I may collectively term the virtue of a man, and if this is the thing which everyone should share in and with which every man should act whenever he wants to learn anything or do anything, but should not act without it. 325.a1

-Then folly is the opposite of *temperance*? It seems so. 332.e5

Gorgias

-Then a person who wants to be happy must evidently pursue and practice *self-control*. 507.d1

-This is the target which I think one should look to in living, and in his actions he should direct all his own affairs and those of his city to the end that justice and *self-control* will be present in one who is to be blessed. 507.d8

Republic

-*Moderation* is surely a kind of order, the mastery of certain kinds of pleasures and desires. 430.e6

-Then you see how right we were to divine that *moderation* resembles a kind of harmony? 431.e8

-And isn't he *moderate* because of the friendly and harmonious relations between these same parts, namely, when the ruler and the ruled believe in common that the rational part should rule and don't engage in civil war against it? *Moderation* is surely nothing other than that, both in the city and in the individual. 442.d2

Timaeus

-Surely anyone with any *sense* at all will always call upon a god before setting out on any venture, whatever its importance. 27.c2

Laws

-And the proper basis is to put spiritual goods at the top of the list and hold them—provided the soul exercises *self-control*—in the highest esteem. 697.b4

***Sophrosune* in Gregory of Nyssa**

(The letter "J" refers to the critical text begun under the direction of Werner Jaeger)

Against Fornication

-This voice cries out, "Lie with me." Nevertheless, the youth's *temperance* retorts, "Watch with me" [Mt 26.38], a statement which manifests vigilance through deeds. Such attentiveness does not yield to blandishments nor does the mind acquiesce to such supplications; the watchfulness of restraint does not

doze off, is not sapped by such importunate pleas, does not become captive to the adornments of form, and is not broken by amorous flattery. J.215

-Let us therefore turn our attention from the spears of that unchaste form, close our eyes to licentiousness, allow the disorders of pleasantries mock us, let *temperance* guard our flesh, and have purity dwell within our bodily members. J.217

On the Inscriptions of the Psalms

-The first division of the Psalter offers by way of preface a life of virtue and a sweetness for the person who both longs for virtue and consumes every image of a reptile-like desire in himself by the teeth of *temperance* which devours the passions instead of beasts. This person thirsts more for union with God than the deer desiring springs of water. 40

Commentary on Ecclesiastes

-Since these words refer to the divine commands, “be steadfast and unmovable [1Cor 15.58],” allow *temperance* to abide in your life along with firm faith, constant love and stability in every kind of beauty, that you may resemble the earth’s eternal stability. J.289

-The heavenly life is nourished and fortified by other means: *temperance* is nourishment of the good where wisdom is bread, righteousness is meat, freedom from passion is drink, not the pleasure of the body which creates desire but whose name and fruit is gladness [*euphrosune*]. Therefore, Ecclesiastes bestows this lovely name upon the soul since it is derived from *eu* and *phronein*. J.371

-Our casting of stones destroys the enemy, a deed closely associated [with the stone itself] because whoever casts the stone of *temperance* at an unchaste thought which feeds the fire through pleasure is victor and always bears a weapon in his hand. Once righteousness becomes a stone against injustice, it destroys this evil and is kept in our bosom. J.397

-We are clearly aware that *temperance* can bring down avarice, and that faith and an accurate perception of [divine] mysteries as well as self-control, humility and the like can strike down this persistent, undefeated evil within. Some persons who are strong, self-controlled and ardent in their faith can check the manner [of evil's entry] and moderate it through habits. J.433

Commentary on the Song of Songs

-We understand the perfumes as virtues—wisdom, justice, *temperance*, fortitude, and so forth. If we anoint ourselves with these aromas, each of us, according to our own capacity and choice, has a good odor. Each of us has his respective odor—one has wisdom or temperance, another has fortitude or justice, or anything else pertaining to virtue. J.35

-The person familiar with scriptural concepts and mysteries understands this from the term “thigh” and knows that the sword signifies the Word. He who has girded himself with this fearful weapon--I mean the sword of *temperance*--is the beloved lying upon his incorruptible bed, one of “the mightily ones of Israel” worthy to be numbered among the sixty. J.193

-Therefore the exercise of *temperance* rightly partakes of contemplation, for just as the pomegranate’s tart skin is nourishing and guards the fruit’s sweetness by completely surrounding it, so is a harsh, austere life of self-control a guardian for the benefits of *temperance*. Hence, this virtue’s praise has two aspects: the external appearances of a well-ordered life and correct actions of a soul free from passion. J.230

-he who has girded himself with *temperance* lives in the light of a pure conscience, for his life is illumined by the lamp of confidence. His soul remains sleepless and undeceived under truth’s rays, and he is not idly occupied by useless dreams. If we achieve this with the Word’s assistance, we will attain the angelic life. J.317

Life of Moses

-Their immoderation at once became destructive to their bodies, and their satiety ended in sickness and death. This example became to them and to those watching them a sufficient cause for *moderation*. J.64

-The person who lacks *moderation* is a libertine, and he who goes beyond *moderation* has his conscience branded, as the Apostle says. J.289

-For the one has given himself up without restraint to pleasures, and the other defiles marriage as if it were adultery. The disposition observed in the mean between these two is *moderation*. J.289