

To Begin so Early and
to Persevere over a
Long Period of Time.

Reflections on Time on
the Horizon of Human
Experience in the
Anonymus Iamblichi

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MIRIAM CAMPOLINA DINIZ PEIXOTO

/ Federal University of Minas Gerais /

To Livio Rossetti

The interest of scholars in the *Anonymus Iamblichi* has been oriented in two main ways: (i) it focuses either on the problem of its dating and authorship, or (ii) on one or other of the many themes focused by the author in this text. My interest is in this second way and I intend to examine the various occurrences of the notion of time and its importance to

characterize the different phases involved in human development in view of its excellence. Until recently these has not been much discussion on time in among thinkers before Plato. But we note that in recent times the interest around this topic has increased and works are emerging on the presence of a reflection on time among thinkers from the first two centuries of the history of philosophy. In our paper, we propose to offer a contribution to the debate on the topic, sharing the reflections that were inspired by reading the anonymous excerpt transmitted in Iamblichus' *Protrepticus*. In his exhortation, the writer of Iamblichus's excerpt reflects on what moves men in their attitudes and deeds, and proposes a way for those who want to become a truly good man (ἀνὴρ ἀληθῶς ἀγαθός – DK 89, 4). And it is in the context of this reflection that, in our view, the notion of time occupies a fundamental position. To consider this topic, I will examine the occurrences of terms and expressions that evoke the notion of time throughout the text, in order to show that this is one of the centrepieces of the author's argument and the way par excellence to understand the underlying concept of human nature at the thought of its author. I would like to present a brief overview of how this topic has been considered so far.

In search of time

There are further usages of χρόνος in the Presocratics, in different contexts, mostly ethical but also cosmological, epistemological, rhetorical and political, and in an expressive number of authors writing in the fifth or early fourth centuries BC. Some authors think that the usage of word χρόνος in the Presocratics has no philosophical significance in them. Ferrater Mora, for example, considered that the concept of time in ancient philosophy has been relegated or placed in parentheses in favour of the concept of being (1979: IV 3241). For Guthrie, “the Greeks are not able to imagine time without the orderly and repeated movement of the sun, the moon and the stars” (Guthrie 1984: 268). In a different direction from that in which Guthrie's conclusions point, Bernabé consider that even if the theme of time is not explicitly treated in the fragments of the Presocratics, it is possible to find the notion underlying their cosmologies, and a conception of time appears “associated with what happens with it” (2013:146–147).¹

In a doctoral thesis presented in 2011, Šćepanović (2011: 172–179),² notes the presence of a certain reflection and recurrent use of a notion of time, even if not yet a theo-

¹ Bernabé distinguishes six basic senses of χρόνος among the Presocratics: (1) “time-life,” or time conceived as the duration of life; (2) “time-order,” thought as regulated duration: cycle of seasons, day and night, years, time measured by clepsydra, etc.; (3) “time-to-happen,” as a sequence of a “before” and a “after” of our now, shaped by the succession of events; (4) “time-change,” the time of becoming (*gignesthai*); (5) “time-mark” or “time-receptacle,” in which events unfold; (6) “linguistic time” or “grammatical time,” relating the distinction that can be established between present / past / future or by means of adverbs such as “before” or “after” (2013:147–148).

² In a recent study on the notions of eternity and time in texts down to 400 BC, S. Šćepanović identifies five main uses of the term χρόνος among the Presocratics: (1) in adverbial phrases expressing duration and passage of time: πολλὸν χρόνον / πλείω χρόνον / ὀλίγον χρόνον / ὀκόσον ἂν χρόνον/ χρόνοι; (2) nominal χρόνος meaning “duration,” “period of time;” (3) prepositional expressions ἐν ὀλίγοι χρόνοι, σὺν πολλῶι χρόνοι, ἐξ ὀλίγου

ry in strict sense about time, in the Presocratics of the 6th and 5th centuries BC. The Šćepanović's proposition seems very interesting, and shows to some extent that, unlike some interpreters, there would rather be a certain reflection and recurrent use of a notion of time, even if not yet a theory in strict sense about time, in the Presocratics of the 6th and 5th centuries BC. The contribution of this author, alongside the classification proposed by Bernabé, constitute a interesting way to examine our subject.

Not without considering the precious reflections on the notion of time that were offered to us by these two scholars, in our paper I intend to follow a different approach. I hope to be able to highlight the relevance of temporal aspects, through the analysis of the different figurations of the notion of time in the *Anonymus of Iamblich* to understand the path proposed by the author to achieve excellence in any field of life. Therefore, I have chosen to examine the following points: the terms and expressions employed to evoke time or some aspect of the temporal dimension within the scope of human life; the reflection about human nature with regard to the development of their natural dispositions, the relation between principle and end, cause and effect and the determination of the character of human actions; the horizon of death and its implications on human behaviour. In order to explain about it, I will consider the terms and expressions that are employed to evoke time or some aspect of the temporal dimension in the framework of human experience; the reflection about human nature with regard to the development of their natural dispositions; and the horizon of death and its implications on human behavior.

In the so-called *Anonymus Iamblich*, probably written in the fifth century,³ several expressions involving the notion of time are applied to consider human nature and condition, the process of learning and the acquisition of excellence, and the evaluation of human commitment to laws and life generally:

(1) the adverbial πολλὸν χρόνον⁴ appears on different occasions, for example in his prescription of the right attitude to a person who aspires to excel in virtue: “to be desirous of what is noble and good, to be hard-working, quick to learn, and willing to continue in these efforts over a long period of time”⁵ (1.2: ἐπιθυμετὴν γενέσθαι τῶν καλῶν καὶ ἀγαθῶν φιλόπονόν τε καὶ πρωιαίτατα μανθάνοντα καὶ πολλὸν χρόνον αὐτοῖς συνδιατελοῦντα);

χρόνου, εἰς τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον; (4) nominal χρόνος signifying “passage of time;” (5) nominal χρόνος meaning “age,” “era” and the differentiation of tenses in the expressions containing χρόνος. Her thesis was presented to the Classical Languages in Literature Department at Jesus College at the University of Oxford.

³ It does not seem plausible to us the thesis of Musti. This author, based on the presence of an economic vocabulary in the quotation, according to him posterior to 4th century, fixes this date as the date for the *Anonymus Iamblich* (Musti 2003: 5–56).

⁴ The expression “(for) a long time” is employed 14 times in Homeric poems. Other occurrences are found between fragments of Epicharmus and Democritus: “You must think, knowing that you can live for a long time, but also for a short time” (DK 23 B 24) “Living in a nasty way, unintelligent, indecent and impure, it is not live badly, but dying for a long time (οὐ κακῶς ζῆν εἶναι, ἀλλὰ πολλὸν χρόνον ἀποθνήσκειν)” (DK 68 B 160).

⁵ The translations from Greek to English are, unless otherwise indicated, those of Graham (2010).

(2) the second fragment said that to have a good reputation it is necessary to start early (αὐτίκα), while he is still young (νέον), to practise persistently (αἰεὶ καὶ μὴ ἄλλοτε ἄλλως), and that it is necessary to develop them simultaneously (συγχρονισθὲν): “having been started immediately and brought to maturity” (αὐτίκα τε ἀρξάμενον καὶ συναυξηθὲν εἰς τέλος), and this supposes “a long time’s familiarity with a thing at length strengthens the practice” (ὁ χρόνος συνῶν μὲν ἐκάστωι ἔργωι καὶ πράγματι πολὺς⁵ καὶ διὰ μακροῦ κρατύνει τὸ ἀσκούμενον), “while a short time is not able to accomplish this” (ὁ δὲ ὀλίγος χρόνος οὐ δύναται τοῦτο ἀπεργάζεσθαι);

(3) in the previous context we find prepositional expressions with the dative and genitive of the noun χρόνος, paired with the adjectives πολὺς and ὀλίγος, meaning “duration,” and the noun is paired with the adjectives πολὺς and ὀλίγος. In 2.7 the author argues that “if someone wishes to learn the art of words⁶ (τὴν τέχνην τὴν κατὰ λόγους),” “he will become no less accomplished than his teacher in a short time (ἐν ὀλίγῳ χρόνῳ),” but virtue “is not able to achieve success in starting late in life or spending a short time on it (ὀλιγοχρονίως);”

(4) in 2.7 it is said that development of these skills presupposes “much time and care” (σὺν πολλῶι χρόνῳι καὶ ἐπιμελείαι) and he warns of damage (Βλάβη) of a reputation acquired quickly (τῆι ἐξ ὀλίγου χρόνου εὐδοξίαι);

(5) in 5.1, the adverbial accusative τὸν λοιπὸν χρόνον points to the future: “if it were possible for a man (...) to remain unageing and immortal for all time”⁶ (εἰ μὲν ὑπῆρχε τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ ... ἀγήρωι τε εἶναι καὶ ἀθανάτῳι τὸν λοιπὸν χρόνον);⁷

(6) in 7.3 the time spent in legality allows men to free themselves from public affairs and to engage in the activities of life (τόν τε αὖ χρόνον τοῖς ἀνθρώποις διὰ τὴν εὐνομίαν εἰς μὲν τὰ πράγματα ἀργὸν γίνεσθαι, εἰς δὲ τὰ ἔργα τῆς ζωῆς ἐργάσιμον).

Human nature, learning and maturation

Already in the first lines of the excerpt of Iamblichus, his author establishes the horizon that must be sought by men who aspire to excellence in whatever field it applies: to realize in view of the best (ἐξεργάσασθαι εἰς τέλος τὸ βέλτιστον). After indicating some of the things that would enter into the calculation of the best, namely, wisdom (σοφία), courage (ἀνδρεία), eloquence (εὐγλωσσία), and generally “virtue, either as a whole or in some part” (ἀρετὴν ἢ τὴν σύμπασαν ἢ μέρος τι αὐτῆς) (1.1), he distinguishes two kinds of things to which one can aspire: those that do not depend on us, that is our natural

⁶ Slightly modified translation.

⁷ Slightly modified translation. Instead of “practice,” Graham’s translation to “ἐπιμελεία.” I prefer “carefully,” characterizing how such learning should take place.

aptitude (φῦναι) and what would be attributed to us by chance (τῆι τύχῃ ἀποδεδόσθαι), and those that depend on the individual himself (τὰ δὲ ἐπ' αὐτῷ ἤδη τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ), on his activity.⁸ The human development in view of the best depends therefore on the conjugation of its natural disposition and of its activity. It is therefore with respect to what depends on us that the reflection of the Anonymous takes place. So he presents three requirements:

1. to begin to do so early (πρωιαίτατα μαθάνοντα);
2. to be a hard-working regarding what is noble and good (ἐπιθυμητὴν γενέσθαι τῶν καλῶν καὶ ἀγαθῶν φιλόπονόν);
3. and to persevere in these efforts over a long period of time (πολὺν χρόνον αὐτοῖς συνδιατελοῦντα).

In the framework of these requirements, we can see how important the notion of time is for someone to become excellent. The verb γενέσθαι expresses the idea of a process; a coming-to-be that has as its goal the pursuit of the best, of what is beautiful and good. And to do that, you need to start early (πρωιαίτατα), to show yourself as a hard-working (φιλόπονός) and to persevere in this process (συνδιατελοῦντα).

But a good nature or character is not enough for man to achieve excellence. He needs to develop these provisions by learning and exercise that must begin as soon as possible, and for a long period of time, in everything and everything that he does, in order to ensure its full development. The pair *proiatata – polyn chronon* indicates that the process of acquiring virtue happens over time. The use of the form of the superlative emphasizes the necessary of learning, which must therefore begin at an early age.

The second fragment insists on the precocity of this process. We find there, repeatedly stated, the need to undertake the exercise in view of the acquisition of such provisions as soon as possible (we have expressions as αὐτίκα δεῖ νέον τε ἀρξασθαι and αὐτίκα τε ἀρξάμενον), and that it extends continuously, regularly (ὀμαλῶς ἀεὶ) and not sporadically (ἀεὶ καὶ μὴ ἄλλοτε ἄλλως), and progressively until it reaches the end (συναυξηθὲν εἰς τέλος). The adverb of time αὐτίκα delimits a precise moment : “at the same moment,” “immediately,” “now.” There is no reason to wait when it comes to start on the learning that must attain a given excellence, whatever it is, in whatever scope it takes. It is necessary (δεῖ) to begin soon and progress in time, as in a *crescendo*, striving on every occasion that presents itself regularly (ὀμαλῶς ἀεὶ) and not sporadically (μὴ ἄλλοτε ἄλλως) (2.1). The bet is on the conviction that when you are young you have a better predisposition to learning and, while the character is not yet fully conformed, it is still possible to do so in view of the best. Moreover, learning early enough, and therefore having plenty of time

⁸ This distinction reminds the distinction established by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* between which depends on us, that is, what is contingent and can be the object of deliberation, and what does not depend on us, what is necessary, and cannot be the subject of deliberation.

to exercise in excellencies, the young man will form a reputation that will preserve him in the future from being afflicted by evils like jealousy and distrust. And it will also make him to be considered as a worthy of glory and trustworthy person because his reputation was not settled precipitously or instantaneously, but gradually (κατὰ σικμρὸν) and over a long time (ἐκ πολλοῦ).

The basic thesis that it is not enough for man to have a good natural disposition, but he still needs a *ponos*, an activity. His natural disposition (φῦναι) should be developed and increased through a learning process based on hard-working (φιλόπονία) and exercise (ἄσκησις), through which it is the only possibility for men to achieve what they desire. Consequently, what is at stake is the very realization of human nature, taking into account the perfection of the disposition that is innate to it and the constitution of a habit.⁹

Human nature is then understood as an unfinished work, the realization of it takes place through an improvement of natural dispositions, in a process, which, having begun early, does not come to an end except at the end of its own life. And the mere passage of time is not enough, but early engagement and a continued exercise are also necessary.¹⁰

Whatever you strive for, men will become insurmountable. (1.3);

Virtue, being exercised, engenders faith in itself and good fame (ἀσκηθεῖσα ἡ ἀρετὴ πίστιν ἐμποιεῖ περὶ ἑαυτῆς καὶ εὐκλειαν). (2.4);

Also, the time, if it is accompanied to all works or actions and makes stronger who exercises (ἔτι δὲ καὶ ὁ χρόνος συνὼν μὲν ἐκάστωι ἔργωι καὶ πράγματι πολὺς καὶ διὰ μακροῦ κρατύνει τὸ ἀσκούμενον). (2.6.).

The exercise is therefore thought in terms of its beginning, its regularity and duration, presupposing that its purpose is finally reached when extends over time, not ceasing before it has reached the end of its life or reached the intended excellence. Such a conception of exercise reiterates the understanding of human nature as a process. The author points, therefore, to a process that unfolds in several stages, which presupposes certain conditions, and the character of human action is determined by the horizon that inspires it, i.e. his *telos*. And without this, none of these aspirations can be fully achieved (1.3). When a man desires what is beautiful and good (τῶν καλῶν καὶ ἀγαθῶν), his desire

⁹ Like in Democritus (cf. B 183 and B 242), the importance of exercise is emphasized Cf. Democritus: “a fatigue faced continuously is more tolerable (Πόνος συνεχῆς ἐλαφρότερος), since it has become a habit (ἑαυτοῦ συνηθείη γίνεται).” (DK 68 B 241). It is worth noting the use of the adjective συνεχῆς qualifying πόνος refers to the idea of constancy, of continuity in time, as a condition for the formation of habit.

¹⁰ This purpose is equated with what Democritus says in fragments DK 89 B 183 and B 242: “(...) it is not the time that teaches thinking (χρόνος γὰρ οὐ διδάσκει φρονεῖν), but it is education received since childhood and nature (ἀλλ’ ὠραία τροφή καὶ φύσις);” “Those who become good by exercise (Πλέονες ἐξ ἀσκήσιος ἀγαθοὶ γίνονται) are more numerous than those who are good by nature (ἢ ἀπὸ φύσιος).”

constitutes a principle motor that gives excellence to the actions, and he concurs to develop and improve his natural disposition in view of his excellence.

And it is not enough for someone to launch this path as soon as possible, but it will still be necessary for him to persevere in this process (συνδιατελοῦντα).¹¹ The learning does not take place only once, but it is the result of a long and continuous process that requires the learner to persevere.¹² The contraposition that is established here between a long time (ὁ χρόνος πολὺς) and a brief time (ὁ δὲ ὀλίγος χρόνος), beckons to the slow nature of the process. Thus human perfection requires time, requires incessant investment, to the detriment of which all the energy employed may have been employed in vain.

In contrast to the recommendation to begin learning early and to continue exercising throughout life, we note the difficulties faced by those who start late and the censorship of those who intend to acquire some art in a short time. Let us take a look at what is said about it in fragment 2:

2 (7) And if someone seeks and learns the art of words, in a short time he will become no less accomplished than his teacher, but virtue, which arises from many acts, one is not able to achieve success in by starting late in life or spending a short time on it, but one must be nurtured and grow up with it, resisting both bad words and bad habits, and developing the necessary skills with much time and practice.

(8) At the same time a certain kind of ill will attends a reputation of short duration: those who suddenly or in a short time become rich, skilful, prominent, or heroic, men do not welcome with open arms.

Although it is possible to acquire an art in a short time (ἐν ὀλίγῳ χρόνῳ), it is different with virtue. Since its acquisition requires the concurrence of many works (ἐξ ἔργων πολλῶν), it is not achievable neither for those who began to exercise late (ὄψὲ ἀρξαμένῳ), nor for those who practiced them for a short time (ὀλιγοχρονίως). The habit, as Aristotle also thinks, presupposes repeated and continuous actions to acquire. “Virtue,” says the Anonymous, “must grow and progress with it” (ἀλλὰ συντραφῆναι τε αὐτῇ δεῖ συναυξηθῆναι). Hence, good habits such as bad habits result from a repetition of certain actions over time. On both factors the time factor influences, determining its crystal-

¹¹ The verb συνδια-τελέω clarifies which notion of time is being evoked here. The presence of the preposition „dia- associated with the verb τελέω, i.e. – διατελέω –, indicates, according to LSJ, among other things “continue being or doing so and so,” that is to say, “to continue being or doing something in a certain way,” or, more generally, “to continue,” “to persevere.” The addition of the preposition συν- enriches the compound with the idea of simultaneity (at the same time) or pointing to the idea of a fully realized action.

¹² All in all, we have the idea of perseverance, in the case of the recommendation that the effort (*philoponia*) initiated when one is young, or the earlier in life (*proaitata*), should extend to the end of life, crossing it throughout its extension, thus coinciding with the totality of a lifetime. We will find this idea in Aristotle’s ethics when he says that we can only judge that a person’s life was happy when it has come to an end.

lization.¹³ For this reason he insists that one must dedicate oneself to “worthy things and execute them with much time and care” (κατεργαζόμενον σὺν πολλῶι χρόνῳ καὶ ἐπιμελείαι). So, also for Anonymous, virtue is produced in time and supposes exercise (ἀσκηθεῖσα ἢ ἀρετῆ).

The precocious beginning of learning and the perseverance in the exercise that is related to it, further testify that virtue, far from being a lifelong acquisition, is something that can be lost as soon as it has been acquired. It is also worth noting that in affirming that it is not enough to be “well-born” or to have “a good natural disposition,” it gives activity a fundamental role in the conformation of human nature. Everything that is to come is thus implied in a successful articulation of a given nature (a work of chance) and a commitment to continuous, permanent exercise in order to achieve the desired state of excellence in each thing or activity. We are faced with a conception of time as duration, as process, but also as a determining factor of human development. This happens in time, or rather, through time.

Death and life: a change of perspective

Another aspect that we are interested concerns the human attitude toward death and to what is in some way associated with it. A first occurrence of the theme appears on the occasion of the criticism made by the author of the “fear of death” (φιλοψυχία).¹⁴ After having affirmed the necessity (δεῖ) that men become as self-controlled as possible (ἐγκρατέστατον), to the point of risking their lives to achieve virtue, of not being corrupted by money, it presents, as a counterpoint, the behaviours dictated by excessive attachment to life (φιλοψυχία) and attachment to material goods (φιλοχρηματία).

Both behaviours seem to be determined by the same fear. In other words, attachment to material goods is, in a sense, the consequence of fear of death. In the origin of attachment to material goods, the author identifies fear (4.2: ἄτερ φοβεῖ αὐτούς). In fact, according to the author, people cling to material goods because they believe that in their possession they will have the means to escape those life-threatening vicissitudes: “And concerning fear of death this is the compelling argument” (5.1). Diseases (αἱ νόσοι), old age (τὸ γῆρας) and sudden pains (αἱ ἔξαπναῖοι ζημίαι) are events that manifest, each of them, an aspect of the human experience of the flow of time. Diseases subtract the

¹³ We see in this proposition the anticipation of one of the aspects that configure virtuous action in Aristotle’s ethics, namely, its continuity in time, in addition to its dynamic and active character, which does not delight in a single ephemeral act, but conforms insofar it is a persistent activity and persevering disposition. Virtue is an activity and presupposes for its conformation a succession of virtuous actions, the persistence in realizing them. So it seems to us that when the author affirms that the one who exercises himself for a long time is strengthened, he is saying something close to what Aristotle says.

¹⁴ In several of the translations consulted, we have the term φιλοψυχία translated by “attachment to life.” Graham’s proposition seemed more interesting in the context in which the term is employed, after all, what is at stake in the attachment to life is precisely the fear of death.

dispositions that animate life, establish a forced pause, and may herald death. Old age foreshadows the end of a life. And the sudden fears are events that insure themselves by suspending the apparent regularity of life. Among these sudden fears are, according to the author, the deaths of relatives and animals (4.3: deaths of relatives or domestic animals). In my view, it is the fear of death that hides behind each of these other fears. And death means the tragic evidence that existence is finite, that life is under the yoke of time, which is determined by a beginning and an end. The time of human existence is linear, finite, not a circular and eternal time. Nevertheless, because of their folly, men imagine themselves immortal and invulnerable. And they seek at every price, against everything and against all, to preserve their lives. The fragment number 5 is conclusive in this respect:

5 (1) And concerning fear of death (περὶ φιλοψυχίας) this is the compelling argument. If it were possible for a man, so long as he was not killed by another, to remain unaging and immortal for all time (ἀγήρωι τε εἶναι καὶ ἀθανάτῳ τὸν λοιπὸν χρόνον), there would <be> a good excuse for him to preserve his life (συγγνώμη ἂν <ἦν> πολλῇ τῷ φειδομένῳ τῆς ψυχῆς). (2) But since a lengthened life brings men old age, which is a worse evil (ἐπεὶ δὲ ὑπάρχει τῷ βίῳ μηκνυομένῳ τό τε γῆρας κάκιον ὄν ἀνθρώποις), and not immortality (μὴ ἀθάνατον εἶναι), it is great folly and a habit of selfish words and desires ([ἡ] ἀμαθία ἤδη ἐστὶ μεγάλη καὶ συνήθεια πονηρῶν λόγων τε καὶ ἐπιθυμημάτων) that lead one to preserve life at the cost of a bad reputation (ταύτην περιποιεῖν ἐπὶ δυσκλείῃ), rather than the immortal <fame> that is left in exchange for it (ἀλλὰ μὴ ἀθάνατον ἀντ' αὐτῆς λείπεσθαι <κλέος>), when for a noble death one gains everlasting praise (ἀντὶ θνητῆς οὐσης εὐλογίαν ἀέναον καὶ ἀεὶ ζῶσαν).

The passage is eloquent and the arguments are vehement. In it, we see opposite pairs of opposites γῆρας and ἀγήρας, ἀθάνατος and μὴ ἀθάνατος, δυσκλεία and κλέος. On the one hand, we have those who, proving their ἀμαθία μεγάλη believe it is possible not to grow old or die. Those, driven by ignorance, want to conserve life at all costs even if this means making a bad reputation (δυσκλεία). They pay a very high price for a mirage that will not prevent them from aging or dying. Against this attitude, the author advocates preserving reputation rather than preserving life, and instead of immortality, establishes the primacy of a perennial and everlasting praise on a mortal praise (ἀντὶ θνητῆς οὐσης εὐλογίαν ἀέναον καὶ ἀεὶ ζῶσαν). Here we have a complete and radical inversion of values based on a distinct consideration of the limits that represent, in the scope of human existence, birth and death. Finitude is recognized, and it seeks to transcend it by the trace that can be left behind. If human life is finite, something of it can survive death. If it is not possible to contradict mortal nature, since this is something that does not depend on us, it is inherent in our nature (φῦναι), and we have the possibility of leaving a good reputation in the form of a praise.

There is thus a possibility, even if mitigated, of a survival. For it is that the author does not cease to exhort the acquisition of excellence, and to use it in view of what is just and legal, considering that the worst of all things is to use something that is intrinsically

good for unfair and illegal purposes. The process of forwarding the natural dispositions in view of what is the best (1.1: εἰς τέλος τὸ βέλτιστον), such that to read in the first fragment, has as its horizon justice and legality, which would be the equivalents of what is beautiful and good. The author believes that a man becomes good by availing himself of his abilities for the sake of good, and becomes evil when he uses these same things, even if they are naturally good, in view of evil. The observance of these recommendations and the attitude they advocate is a condition for deserving “the perennial and everlasting praise” which allows men, in a sense, to extend the short duration of their life beyond their ephemeral existence.

Time and lawfulness

As a conclusion, it remains to articulate this reflection with that notion into which all the arguments chained by the Anonymous: the notion of εὐνομία. What can be said about the connection between the different aspects of time and the notion of lawfulness? According to the author, observance of lawfulness confers a certain power over time:

7 (3 and 4) Further, because of lawfulness men’s time is idle when it comes to making political problems (ὄν τε αὖ χρόνον τοῖς ἀνθρώποις διὰ τὴν εὐνομίαν εἰς μὲν τὰ πράγματα ἀργὸν γίγνεσθαι), but hard-working when it comes to gaining a livelihood. (4) In lawfulness men avoid the most unpleasant thoughts, and associate with the most pleasant. For the contemplation of politics is most unpleasant, that of work most pleasant.

The εὐνομία enables a kind of shield that protects the ephemeral life of the adversities engendered by the daily occupations that disturb it, providing a life free of those concerns that tip it. When legality reigns, it is possible to live life without fear (7.5: ἀφόβος), and does not spend the time imagining the future sufferings that can come from the unjust and illegal actions carried out in the present. We have a sort of “time’s economy,” in that the present attitude minimizes much of the future adversities. The connection between *eunomia* and time is further clarified when one expounds the consequences of a life under the rule of lawlessness:

7 (11) And thoughts are not pleasant for those who are awake, nor for those who go to sleep is the reception pleasant, but full of fear; and waking up brings fear and fright, leading the individual to a sudden recollection of evils.

The best for men is, therefore, to spend their lives moving away from what is harmful or unpleasant to them, free from the disturbances that compromise their good life. Conscious of his mortal and vulnerable nature, he who desires to attain excellence and live well, he who wants to be remembered after his death by virtue of his good life, must concentrate his energies on leading the life under the sign of lawfulness. Imbued with this

spirit, abandoning the inglorious struggle against its natural condition, it is possible for men to direct their actions and determine their attitude in accordance with a perspective commensurate with their nature.

What I have tried to do, in this overview of the Anonymus's fragments, is to show the relevance of the temporal dimension to comprehend the motivations that determine human behaviour, which inspire their actions and attitudes. In short, our intention was to focus on one aspect of the reflection developed by its author, which, in our view, is still a little neglected among those who have dealt with this set of fragments.

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MIRIAM CAMPOLINA
DINIZ PEIXOTO

/ Federal University of Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil /
mpeixoto@ufmg.br

**To Begin so Early and to Persevere over a Long Period of Time.
Reflections on Time on the Horizon of Human Experience in the
*Anonymus Iamblichi***

The interest of scholars in the Anonymous of Iamblichus has been oriented in two main ways: it focuses either on the problem of its dating and authorship, or on one or other of the many themes which seem to have been on the agenda of the investigation of its author. My interest is in this second way and I propose to examine the author's conception of time on the horizon of human nature. What makes man truly man (άνηρ ἀληθῶς ἀγαθός – DK 89, 4)? I intend to point the importance of the notion of time in the context of the human experience for who aspires to be an *agathos*, an *enkratestaton*. First, I will examine the lexical and semantic field of time employed to characterize the human condition and justify the prerogatives of author regarding human behaviour and action. Second, I will discuss the different aspects and contexts considered by the author to develop his argument. Among these aspects we have: (i) the distinction between what is innate in us (φῦναι), and what must be acquired through effort (φιλοπονία) and perseverance over time (πολὸν χρόνον); (ii) the opinion that anyone who wants to guide their life in view of what is beautiful and good (καλόν καὶ ἀγαθόν) must to be initiated very early (πρωαίτατα), or should start “immediately and increasing to the end” (αὐτίκα τε ἀρξάμενον καὶ συναυξηθὲν εἰς τέλος); (iii) the need for him to use his own resources “always and not occasionally” (DK 89, 1–2). We will examine in our paper the passages in which a concept of time appears, in order to show that this is one of the centrepieces of the author's argument and the way par excellence to understand the underlying concept of human nature at the thought of its author.

KEY WORDS

Anonymous of Iamblichus, time, human nature, virtue

