

eis ton aióna – “in eternity” or “for the age” or something else?

My secular Ancient-Greek dictionary (Langenscheidt Taschenwörterbuch Altgriechisch – Deutsch) gives following definitions (translated into English):

αἰών: life, lifetime, generation, time span, (period of) time, age, eternity

Now there are an amazing variety of meanings, the difference between a generation and eternity is immense. There are two extreme opinions, the one - Aión always means a (particular) age in the bible, e.g. the Millennium, the other more common view is, that it (always) means *in eternity*, at least the phrase *eis ton aióna* in English bibles often translated with *forever* or *never*, however *forever* or *never* can be understood in a limited sense, *forever until...* or *forever as long...*, *never until...* or *never as long...* at least I would say so.

I will examine several verses in the New Testament, where *age* (in the sense of a particular age) makes no sense (though this doesn't mean it should be understood as eternally), other verses in the Septuagint where this phrase can impossible mean *eternity* on the other hand and especially the verses where it seems to contradict the teaching of universalism.

The well known John Nelson Darby (1) for example defends the translation of aión with eternity arguing with Plato's Timaios 37d

Plato wrote:

*When the father creator saw the creature which he had made moving and living, the created image of the eternal (aidios) gods, he rejoiced, and in his joy determined to make the copy still more like the original; and as this was eternal (aidios), he sought to make the universe eternal (-), so far as might be. Now the nature of the ideal being was eternal (aiónios), but to bestow this attribute in its fullness upon a creature was impossible. Wherefore he resolved to have a moving image of eternity (aión), and when he set in order the heaven, **he made this image eternal (aiónios) but moving according to number, while eternity (aión) itself rests in unity; and this image we call time (chronos).** For there were no days and nights and months and years before the heaven was created, but when he constructed the heaven he created them also. They are all parts of time, and the past and future are created species of time, which we unconsciously but wrongly transfer to the eternal (aidios) essence; for we say that he "was," he "is," he "will be," but the truth is that "is" alone is properly attributed to him, and that "was" and "will be" only to be spoken of becoming in time, for they are motions, but that which is immovably the same cannot become older or younger by time, nor ever did or has become, or hereafter will be, older or younger, nor is subject at all to any of those states which affect moving and sensible things and of which generation is the cause. These are the forms of time, which imitates eternity (aión) and revolves according to a law of number. Moreover, when we say that what has become is become and what becomes is becoming, and that what will become is about to become and that the non-existent is non-existent -- all these are inaccurate modes of expression. But perhaps this whole subject will be more suitably discussed on some other occasion. (2)*

It seems Plato called time (chronos) an eternal (aiónios) image of eternity (aión), I have no idea what Plato meant with that; and it doesn't actually make sense for me. Plato also employs *aidios* (eternal) referring to the gods not *aiónios* though Mr. Darby claims Plato used both words synonymous, *aidios* unlike *aiónios* is the common ancient Greek word supposed to mean *eternal*, though I have read that even *aidios* could have been used in a limited sense.

Generally Plato seems to contrast time (chronos) with eternity (aión), keep this in mind.

Mr. Darby further quotes Aristotle to support his position; I do not really understand what Aristotle seems to say in the quotation Mr. Darby gives. However concerning Aristotle:

Concerning Aristotle's use of the word in his famous sentence, "Life, an *aión* continuous and eternal," it is enough to say that if *aión* intrinsically meant endless, Aristotle never would have sought to strengthen the meaning by adding "continuous" and "eternal" (most probably *aidios*), any more than one would say, God has an eternity, continuous and endless. He has a life, an existence, an *aión* endless, just as man's *aión* on earth is limited; just as Idumea's smoke in the Old Testament is *aiónios*. Nor, had Aristotle considered *aión* to mean eternity, would he have said in this very passage: "the time of the life of each individual has been called his *aión*." (3)

"According to *Aristotle*, and a higher authority need not be sought, *aion* is compounded of *aei*, *always*, and *on*, *being*; that is, *always existing*,...*interminable*, *incessant*, and *immeasurable duration*." Clarke on Gen. 21:33. Others also compel Aristotle into the same service.

Now, a single passage *from the same work* in which Aristotle is represented as defining *aion* to mean radically and strictly endless, duration without end, will show the uncertainty of such criticism, and the folly of attempting to press the great philosopher into the support of endless punishment. The passage referred to (*De Mundo*), has this expression: "from one interminable eternity to another eternity" - *ex aionos atermonos eis eteron aiona*. (4)

Mr. Darby gives as an argument for example:

So John 4: 14, shall not thirst "for the age": is that the meaning? or never? John 6: 51, 58, "live for ever"; John 10: 28, not perish "to the age": is that the sense? John 13: 8, thou shalt not wash my feet "to the age!" A multitude more may be quoted to the same effect; some with the modified sense I have spoken of above of absolute gift and calling never to be retracted. But eis ton aiona never means "to the age" in any case.

Concerning John 13:8 as an example Mr. Darby is partly right in my opinion.

Peter said to Him, You may in no way wash my feet to the age. Jesus answered him, If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me. (Green's Literal Translation)

to the age or maybe better *into the age*, as Mr. Darby correctly observes makes no proper sense in my view as well, even if literally correct translated.

Mr. Darby translates:

Peter says to him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, Unless I wash thee, thou hast not part with me.

However, according to his understanding of the phrase *eis ton aióna* he should have translated

“Peter says to him, you should not wash my feet in eternity.”

This would also sound a bit odd, most sense would make, “*you should not wash my feet forever, as long as I live*” – a limited “forever” or “aión” referring most probably to lifetime or indefinite time, not absolute unconditional endlessness.

The Tyndale New Testament from 1525 is interesting, having no reference to eternity.

Peter sayd vnto him: thou shalt not wesshe my fete whill ye worlde stondeth. Iesus answered him: yf I wasshe ye not thou shalt have no part with me.

This might be a proper definition:

Theodoret (A. D. 300-400) "*Aión is not any existing thing, but an interval denoting time, sometimes infinite when spoken of God, sometimes proportioned to the duration of the creation, and sometimes to the life of man.*" (5)

eis ton aióna referring to men as Peter in John 13:8 meaning most probably *lifetime*, perpetual continuance but within limits.

The relevant verses concerning the salvation of all are only Mark 3:29 and Jude 13

Mark 3:29

ὁς δ' ἂν βλασφημήσῃ εἰς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, οὐκ ἔχει ἄφεσιν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, ἀλλὰ ἔνοχός ἐστιν αἰωνίου ἁμαρτήματος.

Green's Literal, no “universalist” translation as one might suppose

*...but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit has no remission unto the age (*eis ton aióna*), but is liable to eternal judgment...*

Same Verse in Mr. Darby's translation

...but whosoever shall speak injuriously against the Holy Spirit, to eternity has no forgiveness; but lies under the guilt of an everlasting sin...

It should be either *into the age* or *into eternity*, so both translations do possibly not translate the article entirely precise, the Apostolic Bible interlinear translation has *into the eon*. (6)

Jude 13

κύματα ἄγρια θαλάσσης ἐπαφρίζοντα τὰς ἑαυτῶν αἰσχύνας, ἀστέρες πλανῆται οἷς ὁ ζόφος τοῦ σκότους εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τετήρηται.

Green's Literal

wild waves of the sea foaming up their shames, wandering stars for whom blackness of darkness has been kept to the age.

Darby's translation

raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shames; wandering stars, to whom has been reserved the gloom of darkness for eternity.

the Apostolic Bible interlinear translation has *into the eon*.

Mr. Darby says:

A multitude more may be quoted to the same effect; some with the modified sense I have spoken of above of absolute gift and calling never to be retracted. But *eis ton aiona* never means "to the age" in any case.

Take 1 Peter 1: 23, 25, *logou zontos theou kai menontos eis ton aiona*. Does it last only "to the age" (applying it to the *logon*, not to *theou* as some do)? So verse 25, *rema menei eis ton aiona*. So 2 John 2, the truth shall be with us "to the age!" So Jude 13, wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness *eis ton aiona*. Here again "to the age" has no sense.

I agree with Mr. Darby that *into the age*, as if a specific age would be meant, makes no sense for the phrase *eis ton aiōna* in almost all occurrences, especially in the Septuagint which I will show later, though I do not agree that *eis ton aiōna* means strict endlessness or even eternity, at least as long as not referring to God.

Mr. Darby does not deny, that *aiōn* also means age; in fact he translates *aiōn* several times with age, where the KJV translators failed, a few examples:

1 Corinthians 2:7

But we speak God's wisdom in [a] mystery, that hidden [wisdom] which God had predetermined before the ages for our glory

before the ages, pro tōn aiōnōn, the KJV does render it improperly *before the world*

Revelation 20:10

And the devil who deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where [are] both the beast and the false prophet; and they shall be tormented day and night for the ages of ages.

For *ages of ages* instead of *forever and ever* though Mr. Darby was surely no universalist.

Luke 1:33

...and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for the ages, (F17) and of his kingdom there shall not be an end.

Mr. Darby brings following footnote: *F17 Or 'for ever;' but it is plural.*

I regard Mr. Darby as an honest scholar, he seems to have thought *eis ton aiōna* means *in eternity*, but he realized here it is plural (*eis tous aiōnas*) and was honest enough to render it *ages*, at least here; in other occurrences he renders the plural with *for ever* though. Sometimes he translates with *world* or *worlds* as the KJV translators did.

I will now come to the Septuagint, quoting the Apostolic Bible interlinear translation and the translation from Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton.

Exodus 15:18

κυριος βασιλευων τον αιωνα και επ' αιωνα και ετι

Kyrios basileuōn ton aiōna kai ep aiōna kai eti

The Lord reigning into the eon, and unto eon, and still

Into to the eon and still (or furthermore – kai eti), showing that *eon* itself is not endless, the Hebrew has something like *olam va ed*, for “*olam*” and *furthermore*, showing that whatever *olam* means, it can hardly mean endlessness, cause nothing goes beyond an endlessness. The Latin bible (Vulgate) has *aeternum et ultra – in eternity and beyond*, showing that even Latin *aeternum* did not (necessarily) denote endlessness in Jerome’s days.

Exodus 21:6

προσαξει αυτον ο κυριος αυτου προς το κριτηριον του θεου και τοτε προσαξει αυτον επι την θυραν επι τον σταθμον και τρυπησει αυτου ο κυριος το ους τω οπητιω και δουλευσει αυτω **εις τον αιωνα**

...his master shall bring him to the judgment-seat of God, and then shall he bring him to the door, —to the door-post, and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall serve him for ever...

for ever or *into the eon* could at most mean *for lifetime* here, imagine how ridiculous it would be to translate or to understand, *a slave shall serve his master in eternity*. My Torah commentary (German version of the Plaut Chumash) says, that the Rabbis understood *forever* (Hebrew *olam*) as until the Jubilee year, so we might possibly understand *eis ton aiōna* here as *forever, until the Jubilee year*; the Vulgate has *in saeculum*, meaning age.

Exodus 40:15

και εσται ωστε ειναι αυτοις χρισμα ιερατειας **εις τον αιωνα** εις τας γενεας αυτων

And it will be so as to be them an anointing priesthood into the eon, unto their generations.

For me generations rather belong to time than to eternity, it is of course important what the Jewish translators had in mind here when they translated the Hebrew scriptures into Greek, but I can hardly imagine that they understood with *eis ton aióna* here something everlasting without any end, especially as Hebrew *olam* had not such a meaning.

Deuteronomy 15:17

και λημψη το σπητιον και τρυπησεις το ωτιον αυτου προς την θυραν και εσται σοι οικετης **εις τον αιωνα** και την παιδισκην σου ποιησεις ωσαυτως
then you shall take the shoemaker's awl, and make a hole in his ear against the door, and he will be to you a servant into the eon.

This is a kind of parallel verse of Exodus 21:6 already mentioned, it's interesting that the Vulgate has *aeternum* here while it has *saeculum* there, as if it were synonyms, as *saeculum* denotes limited duration, *aeternum* must do so as well to be a synonym, *age* and *eternity* would hardly be synonyms.

Deuteronomy 23:6

ου προσαγορευσεις ειρηνικα αυτοις και συμφεροντα αυτοις πασας τας ημερας σου **εις τον αιωνα**
You shall not address peaceable to them, nor be advantageous to them all your days into the eon.

All your days for eternity is hardly to imagine here – especially in a Platonic sense as days belong to time and not eternity, I guess a long continuance was in the mind of the writer.

1 Samuel 27:12

και επιστευθη δαυιδ εν τω αγχους σφοδρα λεγων ησχυνται αισχυνομενος εν τω λαω αυτου εν ισραηλ και εσται μοι δουλος **εις τον αιωνα**
So David had the full confidence of Anchus, who said, He is thoroughly disgraced among his people in Israel and he shall be my servant for ever.

For ever or into the eon (eis ton aióna) can at most refer to lifetime here, it is impossible to think of eternity here. The Latin has *sempiternus*, showing that to the ancients all these words had not such a strict meaning, as if they meant everlasting without any end but as it seems to me rather “everlastingness” as long as it lasts, but limited by the circumstances it refers to. A Seventh Day Adventist who believes in the destruction of the unrighteous writes concerning the adjective *aiónios* (referring to Matthew 25:46):

It is important to note that the Greek word aionios, translated "eternal" or "everlasting," literally means "lasting for an age." Ancient Greek papyri contain numerous examples of Roman emperors being described as aionios. What is meant is that they held their office for life. Unfortunately, the English words "eternal" or "everlasting" do not accurately render the meaning of aionios, which literally means "age-lasting." In other words, while the Greek aionios expresses perpetuity within limits, the English "eternal" or "everlasting" denotes unlimited duration. (7)

Of course this man might not be the highest authority regarding questions on Greek language but for me it makes sense and seems to fit exactly to the meaning of the phrase *eis ton aióna*, possibly expressing perpetual continuance but within limits according to the things, actions, circumstances or persons applied to, I will come back to this point at my conclusion.

Psalm 73:12

ιδου ουτοι αμαρτωλοι και ευθηνουνται **εις τον αιωνα** κατεσχον πλουτου
Behold, these are the sinners, and they prosper into the eon, holding wealth.

This is kind of my favorite verse, who would seriously claim that sinners prosper eternally?, this alone is striking proof that Hebrew *olam* does not mean *everlasting*, at least doubtlessly not in all occasions, *eis ton aióna* could hardly have been intended to mean *in eternity* here.

Micah 4:5

QUIA OMNES POPULI AMBULABUNT UNUSQUISQUE IN NOMINE DEI SUI NOS AUTEM AMBULABIMUS IN NOMINE DOMINI DEI NOSTRI *IN AETERNUM ET ULTRA*
οτι παντες οι λαοι πορευονται εκαστος την οδον αυτου ημεις δε πορευσομεθα εν ονοματι κυριου θεου ημων **εις τον αιωνα και επεκεινα**
For all the peoples shall go each in his own way; but we shall call go in the name of the Lord our God into the eon (eis ton aióna) and beyond (kai epekeia).

This is also a most interesting verse, as Exodus 15:18, *in eternity and beyond* if this phrase would actually mean eternity, for me it seems impossible that the translators who made the Septuagint understood *eis ton aióna* to express eternity in any case, when they render *eis ton aióna and beyond*.

But there are also examples where *eis ton aióna* refers to God.

One example:

Psalm 119:89

εις τον αιωνα κυριε ο λογος σου διαμενει εν τω ουρανω
Into the eon, o Lord, your word abides in the heaven.

Here we might understand *eis ton aióna* as *in eternity*, but not because the phrase carries this meaning in itself but because applied to God, if we compare *eis ton aióna* with the word *lifelong* we would have a similar effect, *lifelong* applied to men are only a few decades, but applied to God eternity.

I think I'm not the first one who came to this conclusion; for me *eis ton aióna* seems to express perpetual continuance but within limits according to the things, actions, circumstances or persons applied to, not strict infinity or unconditional endlessness but "everlastingness" as long as it lasts, limited by the circumstances it refers to, or meaning simply unknown continuance.

It's also interesting that the Latin words *aeternum* (eternal) and *sempiternum* (everlasting) are also used in a sense of only *lifelong*, and *aeternum* obviously as synonym of *saeculum* (age) in some occasions; it seems that all these words might have had a similar meaning to the ancients and I think this was not infinity.

This is the translation I would choose for *eis ton aióna*:

You shall not address peaceable to them, nor be advantageous to them all your days in perpetuity.

So David had the full confidence of Anchus, who said, He is thoroughly disgraced among his people in Israel and he shall be my servant in perpetuity.

Behold, these are the sinners, and they prosper in perpetuity, holding wealth.

In perpetuity, o Lord, your word abides in the heaven.

For all the peoples shall go each in his own way; but we shall call go in the name of the Lord our God in perpetuity and furthermore.

In perpetuity makes sense in all occurrences but factors out the idea of strict infinity or endlessness and is thereby similar equivocal as the Hebrew and Greek expressions seem to be.

It's a bit unlucky in my opinion that Mr. Darby used Plato as authority and did obviously not examine the use of this phrase in the Septuagint, as *eis ton aióna* is the equivalent of Hebrew *olam* and as this word does not mean eternity, which I think all authorities agree, so *eis ton aióna* does most probably express something similar as *olam* does.

There is one interesting verse, where Mr. Darby does translate exactly as the “universalist” translations, which supports my position concerning *olam*.

Ecclesiastes 12:5

Young's Literal (sometimes called a “universalist” translation)

*Also of that which is high they are afraid, And of the low places in the way, And the almond-tree is despised, And the grasshopper is become a burden, And want is increased, For man is going unto his **home age-during (olam)**, And the mourners have gone round through the street.*

Mr. Darby's translation

*they are also afraid of what is high, and terrors are in the way, and the almond is despised, and the grasshopper is a burden, and the caper-berry is without effect; (for man goeth to his **age-long home**, and the mourners go about the streets;)*

There is also another interesting expression in the Septuagint, remember Plato contrasted time (chronos) with eternity (aión).

Isaiah 34:10

...νυκτος και ημερας και ου σβεσθησεται εις τον αιωνα χρονον και αναβησεται ο καπνος αυτης ανω εις γενεας ερημωθησεται και εις χρονον πολυν

...nuktos kai êmeras kai ou sbesthêsetai **εις τον αιωνα χρονον** και anabêsetai o kapnos autês anō eis geneas erêmōthêsetai kai eis chronon polun

...night and day; and it shall not be extinguished **into the eon of time**. And shall ascend her smoke upward; unto her generations she shall be made desolate, and for a long time she shall be made desolate.

While Plato contrasted *chronos* with *aión*, here the *aión* belongs to time (chronos), an **eon of time**, for me it seems obvious that they didn't understand the phrase *εις τον αιωνα* in a Platonic sense (whatever Plato meant with "time being an eternal/eonian image of eternity").

According to Mr. Darby's understanding one must translate, **into the eternity of time** – but this would sound odd and contradict Plato's definition of eternity I suppose, which Mr. Darby seems to see as kind of authoritative.

Again the translation *in perpetuity of time* would make the best sense like in the other occurrences, preventing us from such curiosities as *in eternity and furthermore, eternity of time*; the wicked prospering-, or a slave serving his master in eternity.

I will now come to my last points, Mr. Darby though he agrees that *aión* means occasionally *age* insists that *aiónios* means *eternal*.

Mr. Darby wrote:

...and at the same time philosophical force of the word, *aion*, *aionios*. Eternity, unchangeable, with no 'was' nor 'will be,' is its proper force, that it can be applied to the whole existence of a thing, so that nothing of its nature was before true or after is true, *to telos to periechon*. But its meaning is eternity, and eternal. To say that they do not mean it in Greek, as Jukes and Farrar and S. Cox, and those they quote, is a denial of the statements of the very best authorities we can have on the subject. If Plato and Aristotle and Philo knew Greek, what these others say is false. That this is the proper sense of *aionios* in Scripture, is as certain as it is evident. In 2 Corinthians 4: 18, we have *ta gar blepomena proskaira, ta de me blepomena aionia*. That is, things that are for a time are put in express contrast with *aionia*, which are not for a time, be it age or ages, but eternal. Nothing can be more decisive of its positive and specific meaning.

...But this does not alter the meaning of the word: *aionios* is properly the opposite to *proskairos*.

Mr. Darby refers here to 2 Corinthians 4:18, however *proskairos* is not time (chronos) itself but seems rather to be a period, Plato did not contrast a period (*proskairos*) with eternity but time itself (chronos) with eternity (aión), so Mr. Darby is wrong here in my opinion.

The word *proskairos* also occurs in Matthew 13:21, Mark 4:17, and Hebrews 11:25

I'll show these verses now in several translations, before I turn to 2 Corinthians 4:18 in detail:

Matthew 13:21

New International Version

*But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time (Gr. *proskairos*). When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.*

King James Version

Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

Mark 4:17

New International Readers Version

*But they have no roots. So they last only a short time (Gr. *proskairos*). They quickly fall away from the faith when trouble or suffering comes because of the message.*

King James Version

And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.

Hebrews 11:25

King James Version

*Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season (Gr. *proskairos*);*

New International Version

He chose to be ill-treated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.

In all these occurrences *proskairos* rather seems to mean a short time, a season or a while.

An online dictionary, it seems to be the Liddell Scott; gives the following meaning for *proskairos* (προσκαιρος): *for a season, temporary* (8)

“*season*” is defined in an English dictionary: *A period of time not very long; a while; a time.*

Before I turn to 2 Corinthians 4:18, remember Mr. Darby wrote, “*But this does not alter the meaning of the word: *aiónios* is properly the opposite to *proskairos*.*”

But what is the opposite of *a period of time not very long*? Of course eternity would be the opposite of such a period, but also one or several long ages, or **even a single century would be the full contrast to a short season**, while the contrast of eternity is time and not a season.

The verse of interest is:

2. Corinthians 4:18

μη σκοπούντων ἡμῶν τὰ βλεπόμενα ἀλλὰ τὰ μὴ βλεπόμενα· τὰ γὰρ βλεπόμενα πρόσκαιρα, τὰ δὲ μὴ βλεπόμενα αἰώνια.

mê skorountōn êmōn ta blepomena alla ta mê blepomena ta gar blepomena proskaira, ta de mê blepomena aiōnia.

*For tho thingis that ben seyn, ben but durynge **for a schort tyme**; but tho thingis that ben not seyn, ben euerlastyng. (Wycliffe Bible)*

*So we don't spend all our time looking at what we can see. Instead, we look at what we can't see. What can be seen lasts **only a short time**. But what can't be seen will last forever. (NIRV)*

As I said *proskairos* is not time itself, this would be *chronos*, but rather a (shorter) period as already shown, you can contrast strict opposites or things that are related to each other, you can contrast a lake with a desert and you can contrast a lake with an ocean; one might suppose here is contrasted time with timeless eternity in a Platonic sense, but you can also contrast something which lasts only a short present period with something that is yet future and will last for ages, as I already said.

If Paul would have contrasted time with eternity I think he would have written,

*For the things which are seen are *chronikos* (temporary, in the sense of pertaining to time); but the things which are not seen are *eternal* (pertaining to eternity).*

But Paul did not use *chronikos* (χρονικος), the adjective of *chronos* (time), which I think he would have done, if he had intended to contrast time with eternity here, but he used *proskairos*, which is not related to time itself, but means rather a season.

I think this verse proves in no way that *aiōnios* should be understood as infinite, because it does simply not say so. It might be the perfect definition of Hebrew *olam* which means something like hidden time as far as I know:

Things that are seen last only for a (short present) period, but things yet future, not seen yet and with an unavowed end, are lasting for (long future) ages.

This might be a possible interpretation without any relation to a supposed infinity, endlessness or timeless eternity as Mr. Darby and others suppose.

Mr. Darby further claimed that Philo of Alexandria, who was contemporary with Christ, used *aiōnios* in the meaning of *everlasting* or at least the noun *Aiōn* in a Platonic sense, using him as authority to support his opinion, however:

Philo, who was contemporary with Christ, generally used *aidion* to denote endless, and always used *aiōnion* to describe temporary duration. Dr. Mangey, in his edition of Philo, says he never used *aiōnion* to interminable duration. **He uses the exact phraseology of Matthew 25:46**, precisely as Christ used it. *"It is better not to promise than not to give prompt assistance, for no blame follows in the former case, but in the latter there is dissatisfaction from the weaker class, and a deep hatred and everlasting¹ punishment [kolasis aiōnios] from such as are more powerful."*

Here we have the exact terms employed by our Lord, to show that *aiónion* did not mean endless but did mean limited duration in the time of Christ. Philo always uses *athanaton*, *ateleuteton* or *aidion* to denote endless, and *aiónion* for temporary duration. (9)

¹this was also quoted on other pages, in the context it seems to be about several years of imprisonment:

It is better absolutely never to make any promise at all than not to assist another willingly, for no blame attaches to the one, but great dislike on the part of those who are less powerful, and intense hatred and long enduring punishment (kolasis aiónios) from those who are more powerful, is the result of the other line of conduct.

Dr. Yonge translated the phrase “aionios kolasis” as “long enduring punishment.” **Given the context of Philo’s passage, the length of the punishment would be a few years to about a decade.** Below I’ve copied the primary definition of each Greek word from perseus.org. Notice that Dr. Yonge’s translation is fully consistent with both the primary definition of each word, and the context of Philo’s passage.

The passage of Philo containing the phrase is preserved in a Greek fragment found in *The Parallels of John of Damascus*. (10)

The last point, three verses where Mr. Darby was kind of inconsequent

Titus 1:2

ἐπ’ ἐλπίδι ζωῆς αἰωνίου, ἣν ἐπηγγείλατο ὁ ἀψευδὴς θεὸς **πρὸ χρόνων αἰωνίων**

Green’s Literal

on hope of eternal life which the God who does not lie promised before eternal times

Mr. Darby’s translation

*in [the] hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised **before the ages of time,***

2 Timothy 1:9

τοῦ σώσαντος ἡμᾶς καὶ καλέσαντος κλήσει ἁγία, οὐ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα ἡμῶν ἀλλὰ κατὰ ἰδίαν πρόθεσιν καὶ χάριν, τὴν δοθεῖσαν ἡμῖν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ **πρὸ χρόνων αἰωνίων**

Green’s Literal

the One having saved us and having called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace given to us in Christ Jesus before eternal times

Mr. Darby’s translation

*who has saved us, and has called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to [his] own purpose and grace, which [was] given to us in Christ Jesus **before [the] ages of time***

In both verses *pro chronōn aiōniōn*, *before eonian times*, having a beginning they can hardly be eternal, Mr. Darby knew this quite well I suppose, therefore translating with ages, showing that at least here he understood *aiōnios* as pertaining to ages. The Vulgate has *ante tempora saecularia*, something like *before times age-abiding*, as *saeculum* means age, *saecularia* should mean *age-abiding*, however in later times *saecularia* seems to have been understood as *pertaining to the world* (modern *secular*), probably therefore does for example the King James Version following the Vulgate, translate *before the world began*.

Romans 16:25.26

...κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν μυστηρίου χρόνοις αἰώνιαις σεσιγημένου, ²⁶ φανερωθέντος δὲ νῦν διὰ τε γραφῶν προφητικῶν κατ' ἐπιταγὴν τοῦ αἰωνίου θεοῦ ...

...*kata apokalypsin mysteriου chronois aiōniois sestigēmenou*, ²⁶ *phanerōthentos de nun dia te graphōn prophētikōn kai epitagēn tou aiōniou Theou ...*

Green's Literal translation

*Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel, and the proclaiming of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery **having been kept unvoiced during eternal times**, ²⁶ **but now has been made plain, and by prophetic Scriptures**, according to the commandment of the eternal God, made known for obedience of faith to all the nations;*

Mr. Darby's translation

*Now to him that is able to establish you, according to my glad tidings and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to [the] revelation of [the] mystery, as to which silence has been kept **in [the] times of the ages**, but [which] has now been made manifest, and by prophetic scriptures, according to commandment of the eternal God, made known for obedience of faith to all the nations –*

The *eternal times* (*chronois aiōniois*) had an end; Mr. Darby translates *aiōnios* here with *of the ages*.

Beside the point that the phrase *eternal times* is a contradiction in itself, how would this fit to the Platonic view of time contrasted with eternity?, if Plato separates time from eternity (though I'm not 100% sure), but Paul calls *times* "*eternal*", than I think Paul didn't use *aiōnios* in a Platonic sense, as did not the translators of the Septuagint as I've shown; but Paul mention *eternal times* 3x where they had either beginning or end and most probably both which also proves Strong's definition of *aiōnios* wrong (Strong number 166).

A good translation of *aiōnios* in the Bible might be *perpetual*, I will show why; for me being German, it helped me to do this examination partly in English, we use our German word *ewig* meaning *eternal*, often in a loose sense, e.g. "*Ich habe schon ewig auf dich gewartet*"-meaning "*I've been waiting for you eternally*", we do not say so as a hyperbole, it is just the sense we often use it in common language, meaning *a long time*, however in spiritual matters, we're lead to suppose it means eternal in its strictest sense. As in English *eternal* seems to be used in a stricter sense, this helps me to see where infinity was impossibly in the mind of a writer while in German I would not see it, because German *ewig* is kind of obscure.

I hope you understand what I want to say, as some scholars seem to acknowledge, the idea of strict infinity or eternity was foreign to the ancients. I will again show a verse from the Latin Vulgate:

1 Samuel 27:12

CREDIDIT ERGO ACHIS DAVID DICENS MULTA MALA OPERATUS EST CONTRA POPULUM SUUM ISRAHEL ERIT IGITUR MIHI SERVUS SEMPITERNUS

And Achish believed David, saying, He hath made his people Israel utterly to abhor him; therefore he shall be my servant everlastingly.

Everlastingly (sempiternus) can only mean for lifetime here, *aeternum* (eternal) was used in the same sense (e.g. Deuteronomy 15,17), it somehow helped me to understand how loose the ancients might have used these words when infinity was not yet so much in their mind.

Now I will show why *perpetual* might be the proper translation of *aiónios* in all occurrences, a dictionary gave me following German meanings for *perpetual*: *andauernd, fortwaehrend* (lasting, continuing), *immerwaehrend* (everlasting), *ewig* (eternal)

These various meanings of this one word further helped me to understand how the ancients might have understood *aiónios*, I'll quote Green's Literal Translation - altered according to my understanding:

Romans 16,25.25

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel, and the proclaiming of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery having been kept unvoiced during perpetual (aiónios) times, but now has been made plain, and by prophetic Scriptures, according to the commandment of the perpetual (aiónios) God, made known for obedience of faith to all the nations;

The *perpetual times* had an end, *perpetual times* is not such a curiosity and contradiction in terms as *eternal times*, the *perpetual God* is of course eternal, but not because He is called perpetual but because it is self-evident. However the times are never as long-lasting as God, though described with the same term applied to God (I think this shows that Paul didn't want to tell us that God is eternal when he called God *eonian* but wanted to tell us something different, it is utterly stupid in my opinion to want to prove with this verse that *aiónios* means eternal when in the same sentence *passed by times* are called *aiónios* as well).

Titus 1:2

...on hope of perpetual (aiónios) life which the God who does not lie promised before perpetual (aiónios) times...

It is not wrong to suppose a *perpetual life* promised by God to be everlasting though not necessarily (but the bible also speaks about immortality); again *before perpetual times* is not such a curiosity as *before eternal times*, again no reason to suppose that *perpetual times* last as long as *perpetual life* given as a present from God, though appointed with the same adjective.

Matthew 25:46

And these shall go away into perpetual (aiónios) chastening, but the righteous into perpetual (aiónios) life.

Again the same words applied to both, again we can suppose a *perpetual life* given as gift from God to the righteous is indeed everlasting (though it must not necessarily be endless - what if one of them would apostatize in future times?), however a *perpetual chastening* of a just and merciful God, why should we suppose it, to be never-ending torment or even utter destruction if the adjective does not in itself express infinity? (The Greek word *kolasis* seems to have meant *corrective, remedial punishment* in ancient secular Greek; I hope *chastening* fits this meaning) Once again, if *perpetual times* are not lasting as long God lasts, why should then *perpetual chastening* last as long as *perpetual life*?

Matthew 18:8.9

And if your hand or your foot offends you, cut it off and throw it from you; it is good for you to enter into life lame or maimed, than having two hands or two feet to be thrown into the perpetual (aiónios) fire. And if your eye offends you, pluck it out and throw it from you; for it is good for you to enter into life one-eyed, than having two eyes to be thrown into the fiery valley of Ennom (Gehenna of fire).

I often wonder if Gehenna has any eschatological meaning, this is the only verse where Gehenna is called *aiónios fire*, Matthew 25:41 must not necessarily refer to Gehenna, also I doubt if the lake of fire refers to Gehenna.

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus called the temple of Jerusalem *aiónios* when it had already been destroyed (11), if the Jews in Jesus' time actually kept alive a continuing fire burning in Gehenna (maybe for decades???), Jesus might have referred to this earthly fire, calling it *aiónios*, meaning nothing but the real, literal and perpetual fire, burning and kept alive unquenched in the real literal valley of Ennom.

Philemon 15.16

For perhaps for this he was separated for an hour, that you might receive him perpetually (aiónios); no longer as a slave, but beyond a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, and how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

It seems few translations have understood *aiónios* here as if here is thought of receive him for all eternity in the future life, the New International Translation has:

Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good...

But for me it is not sure whether here is meant for lifetime or also in the future life, again *perpetually* preserves the dubious meanings of *aiónios* and *olam* as it allows both interpretations, we should not forget that the writers of the New Testament were Jews, Hebrews and not Platonic philosophers.

According to a secular ancient Greek dictionary online, *perpetual* is actually a meaning of *aiónios*, the primary meaning is given as *lasting for an age* (12).

I came across another interesting thing; an archaic English translation of the bible (13), Where John 3:16 is rendered the following:

"God lufode middan-eard swa, dat he seade his an-cennedan sunu, dat nan ne forweorde de on hine gely ac habbe dat ece lif."

About this word I've read something interesting (14):

Old English versions were made not from the Greek, but from the Latin Vulgate, between the years 680 and 995. The four Gospels were done, and probably other parts. The Latin adjective *aeternum* (which Jerome used for eonian) is always rendered by the little word *ece*. Where Jerome for the noun has *seculum*, the Old English uses *worulde* (world) in all sixteen cases. Where Jerome has *in aeternum*, the Old English eight times has *ecnysse*, five times *never* (with a negative in the Latin), and once *ever*. The two words, *ece* and *world*, will amply repay a little investigation.

The once very common English word *ece*, which can be traced down till about 1260 (although it disappeared as an adjective soon after that), is stated to come from the Old English verb *ecan*, meaning to "prolong, augment, increase." The word survives as a verb, to eke, meaning to add, lengthen, and as an adverb, meaning, also, in addition. A nickname was originally "an eke name," that is, an added name. In Scottish Law, an eik is an addition to a legal document.

The reason why the simple word *ece* was forced out of English probably was that it was too equivocal. Theology was trying to make it stand for "everlasting," whereas it only meant "lasting." These latter terms were to take its place, as in Cursor Mundi (The Course of the World, a metrical version of Bible history, written about 1320), which has the line, "Through Jesus come to life lasting" (Thoru Jhesu com to liif lastand). Soon after this time, the word everlasting took the place of *ece* and *lasting*, a transition which made a very great deal of difference.

I will close now, as there have countless articles been written on this subject, but had I doubts especially concerning the phrase *eis ton aióna* what it does actually mean.

There is also an interesting opinion concerning *aiónios*, if it would actually mean *eternal*:

Wilhelm Barclay, I think a Greek scholar and bible translator wrote (15):

Second, one of the key passages is Matthew 25:46 where it is said that the rejected go away to eternal punishment, and the righteous to eternal life. The Greek word for punishment is kolasis, which was not originally an ethical word at all. It originally meant the pruning of trees to make them grow better. I think it is true to say that in all Greek secular literature kolasis is never used of anything but remedial punishment. The word for eternal is aionios. It means more than everlasting, for Plato - who may have invented the word - plainly says that a thing may be everlasting and still not be aionios. The simplest way to out it is that aionios cannot be used properly of anyone but God; it is the word uniquely, as Plato saw it, of God. Eternal punishment is then literally that kind of remedial punishment which it befits God to give and which only God can give.

Though I do not share this view personally, it shows that the teaching of universalism does not stand or fall with the translation of the word *aiónios*, while the doctrine of endless torment can only be proven true if it can be shown, that *aiónios* means strict infinity or endlessness in all occasions or at least in Matthew 25:46 (and even then would annihilationism not have been refuted, eternal punishment still could be utter destruction and not everlasting punishing).

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