PHILOSOPHY AND THEME OF THE OLD ENGLISH POEM "THE EXILE"

The anonymous and untitled poem of 115 lines found in the Exeter Book, traditionally has been identified as "The Wanderer," the title Thorpe gave to the poem in his 1842 edition of the Exeter Codex, the text of which edition was based on a transcript made by him at Exeter ten years earlier.

However, some scholars, for example, Wrenn and Onions, have said "The Wanderer" is a misleading title because the poem deals in large measure with exile and only incidentally with wandering. I agree, and for that reason I have broken with tradition by calling the poem "The Exile" in this article.

Apart from the account of the Exile's personal tribulation, the poem contains thirteen statements which, in my opinion, constitute the poet's doctrine or philosophy. According to my interpretation, those statements group into three categories:

- temporal life (nos. 1-5, 8-10 below)
- secular conduct (6-7, 12)
- religious conduct (11, 13)

1. Often an exile (anhaga "man alone, solitary thinker") experiences God's grace and mercy. (11. 1-2a)
2. A man's lot is fully determined. (5)
3. A dulled state of mind cannot alter, nor can a resentful thought provide help against a man's lot. (15-16)
4. This earth day by day fails and breaks down. (62b-63)
5. Indeed/verily a man cannot become wise until he possesses a great number of years in the realm of the world. (64-65a)
6. A wise man is patient: not too angry, hasty of speech, compliant, rash, timid, exultant, avaricious, nor ever too eager for boasting. (65b-69)
7. A warrior, bold in spirit, ought to wait when he makes a vow until he knows for certain in which direction the inclination of his heart will turn. (70-72)
8. The wise warrior shall perceive how immaterial it will be when the riches of all this world stand waste. (73-74)
9. All the kingdom of the earth is full of hardship: the decree of events changes/makes worse the world under the heavens. (106-07)
10. Here is transitory property, friend, warrior; all the foundation of the earth is becoming inactive/useless. (108-10)
11. Excellent is he who holds his faith. (112a)
12. The warrior should never too readily make public the indignation/resentment of his heart unless he, the earl, first knows zealously
how to effect the remedy. (112b-114a)

13. Well is it to him who seeks God's mercy, solace from the Father in the heavens, where for us all stands the security. (114b-115)

In regard to the maxims contained in 6 above, Mitchell is probably right in suggesting that "too" in *ne sceal no to hatheort*, etc., is a form of meiosis or understatement because the qualities stated are those which a wiseman would not possess. In other words, the qualities are undesirable in themselves, rather than in excess. This would appear to rule out a stress on the value of moderation.

However, if the ModE translations of the OE words are correct, apart from *patient* the remaining adjectives in the maxims - *angry, hasty, compliant, rash, timid, exultant, avaricious, eager* - denote imbalance of behavior and character. For example, *angry* "feeling or showing anger; incensed or enraged" denotes an excess of emotion, anger being one of the seven deadly sins (pride, lust, envy, anger, covetousness, gluttony, sloth). On a scale of + "excess" and - "deficiency" the adjectives listed above may be marked as follows:

A wise man is patient NOT
+ angry - anger is a deadly sin
+ hasty (of speech)
- compliant
+ rash
- timid
+ exultant
+ avaricious - covetousness is a deadly sin
+ eager (for boasting, a form of pride, a deadly sin).

In effect, the Exile has reflected on his tribulations, the transience and mutability of life and worldly things, and that reflection has led him to wisdom. As a result, he tells us in the maxims that the wise man is one who is patient "possessing or demonstrating quiet, uncomplaining endurance under distress or annoyance: long-suffering." A patient man, consequently, is one whose character and behavior are not given to imbalance, not marked by either excess or deficiency.

Having presented my interpretation of the maxims, I now offer a summary of statements 1-13.

Temporal life: In life often a sorrowing exile experiences the unmerited but freely given love and favor of God. Life is full of hardship, and the world is becoming worse daily; however, nothing a man does can change his earthly lot. Everything is transitory, and the man wise in years forsees how barren the earth will be when it comes to ruin, as it now is heading.

Secular conduct: A wise man is patient; his character and behavior are not marked by excess or deficiency. A warrior does not complain about something he is unable to remedy. (However, a preferable interpretation, in my view, is: a warrior should not voice his woes unless first, through reflection on them, he has gained the wisdom that earnestly leads him to