

## Plotinian Ancestry\*

JAAP MANSFELD

“Who are you and from where among men? Where are your town and your parents?” These are the first questions addressed to a stranger in the Homeric epics.<sup>1</sup> The answer informs the questioner as to the other’s place of origin and social status. We are dealing with an important traditional custom. Xenophanes tells us that questions of this kind were put to him on social occasions.<sup>2</sup> Authors identified themselves by giving their name and ethnonym at the beginning of their work (“Alcmeon of Croton,” “Herodotus of Halicarnassus,” “Thucydides of Athens”). In the fragments of the *Physicorum Opiniones*, i.e. in the first book of his *Physics*, Theophrastus gives the name of the philosopher he discusses and as a rule adds the name of his native city and sometimes that of his father; he speaks of master-pupil relationships and provides relative dates.<sup>3</sup> We are told that a great

\* This paper was written as an addendum to the second Festschrift (*ICS 19* [1994]) in honour of Miroslav Marcovich.

<sup>1</sup> *Il.* 21. 150 (the only instance in the *Iliad*), *Od.* 7. 238: τίς πόθεν εἰς ἀνδρῶν; (quoted already by Xenophanes, see next note, then e.g. at Clem. *Protr.* 1. 9. 1, at Themist. *In An. Pr.* p. 49.1 f. Wallies, and at Ammon. *In De Int.* p. 2.15 Busse). *Od.* 1. 170, 10. 325, 14. 187, 15. 264, 19. 105, 24. 298: τίς πόθεν εἰς ἀνδρῶν; πόθι τοι πόλις ἦδὲ τοκῆς; (quoted e.g. as a question put to Bion of Borysthenes apud D.L. 4. 46 = fr. 1A. 12 and apud Stob. *Flor.* 4. 29a. 13 = fr. 2. 3 Kindstrand [J. F. Kindstrand, *Bion of Borysthenes. A Collection of the Fragments with Introd. and Comm.* (Stockholm 1976) 176 gives a list of parallels for this quotation which is not complete; Bion’s reply is capped by another Homeric line, see below, note 23], at Sen. *Apocol.* 5. 4, at Luc. *Icarom.* 23, at Clem. *Strom.* 6. 2. 11. 3–4, who argues that the Homeric line is paraphrased by Euripides in the *Aigeus*: “What country must we say you have left to be a guest in this city? What is the border of your native land? Who begat you? After what father are you called?” [fr. 1 N: ποῖαν σε φῶμεν γαῖαν ἐκλελοιπότα / πόλει ξενουῦσθαι τῆδε; τίς πάτρας ὄρος; / τίς ἔσθ’ ὁ φύσας; τοῦ κεκήρυξαι πατρός;], at Olymp. *In Alc.* § 187.15 Westerink, and at Philop. *In An. Pr.* p. 23.6 Wallies). Compare the similar questions from tragedy cited by Leaf ad *Il.* 21. 150 and Denniston ad Eur. *El.* 779–80, to which add Soph. *Trach.* 421 and Eur. *Phoen.* 123.

<sup>2</sup> Fr. 18. 4–5 Diehl = 21 B 22. 4–5 D–K apud Athen. 2. 54e: “Who are you and from where among men, and what is your age, my friend? How old were you when the Mede came?”

<sup>3</sup> The verbatim quotation (*Phys. Op.* fr. 6 Diels = fr. 227C FHSG) apud Alex. *In Met.* p. 39. 8 ff. Diels, περί Παρμενίδου καὶ τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ καὶ Θεόφραστος ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ Περί τῶν φυσικῶν οὕτως λέγει· τούτῳ δὲ ἐπιγενόμενος Παρμενίδης Πύρρητος ὁ Ἐλεάτης κτλ. (“after him came Parmenides son of Pyres, of Elea”) inspires confidence that similar data in the other fragments of the so-called *Phys. Op.* derive from Theophrastus as well. Aristotle too mentions the ethnonym in important contexts, though not the father’s name, e.g. in the first book of *Met.*

number of cities competed for the honour of being Homer's birthplace, so that in jest he could be called a "cosmopolite."<sup>4</sup> According to the *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi*, the emperor Hadrian asked the Pythia "from where and whose son" Homer was, and received an answer which began with "you ask me about the unknown family and fatherland of the immortal siren," and told him what they were.<sup>5</sup> And so on; examples can be multiplied ad lib.

Information of this nature is also a feature of Greek biographies, which as a rule begin with a *genos*,<sup>6</sup> that is to say with an account of (1) the protagonist's city of birth, (2a) the name of his father and occasionally that of his mother, a characterization of (2b) his background, e.g. by details about his family tree, and about (3) his education and (4) his date. The order of these items may vary from case to case. The biographical sections in Diogenes Laertius' *Lives and Apophthegms of those who have Distinguished themselves in Philosophy and the Doctrines of each School* always begin with a *genos*, which may be very brief (name, patronymic, ethnicon) but which more often is quite detailed. I prefer to quote another typical example, viz. the opening of ps.-Soranus' Ἴπποκράτους γένος καὶ βίος:<sup>7</sup>

(1) Hippocrates was of Coan origin (γένει . . . Κῶος), (2a) son of Heraclides and Phainarete. (2b) He traced his family (γένος) back to Heracles and Asclepius, being the twentieth (in line of descent) from the former and the nineteenth from the latter. . . (3) He was a pupil of his father Heraclides, then of Herodicus, according to some authorities also of the rhetorician Gorgias of Leontini, and of the philosopher Democritus of

---

or at *Met.* 365a18–20. A number of *doxai* discussed in Arist. *Met.* A are treated with greater precision in Theophr. *Phys.* A; the patronymics are instances of this precision. See further e.g. the reverberations of this practice in Aetius 1. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Procl. *Chrest.* V p. 99.13 f. Allen: καὶ καθόλου πᾶσα πόλις ἀντιποιεῖται τάνδρος, ὅθεν εἰκότως ἂν κοσμοπολίτης λέγοιτο. The various *Lives of Homer* too cite sources concerned with purported native cities. The word κοσμοπολίτης is rare. We may cite D.L. 6. 63: "Asked where he was from, Antisthenes said, 'I am a citizen of the cosmos'" (ἐρωτηθεὶς πόθεν εἶη, "κοσμοπολίτης" ἔφη; perhaps, however, we should emend to κόσμου πολίτης).

<sup>5</sup> *Cert.* 34 ff. Allen: τοῦ γὰρ βασιλέως πυθομένου πόθεν Ὀμηρος καὶ τίνος, ἀπεφοίβασε δι' ἐξάμετρον τόνδε τὸν τρόπον· ἄγνωστόν μ' ἔρειαι γενεὴν καὶ πατρίδα γαῖαν / ἀμβροσίου σειρήνος κτλ.

<sup>6</sup> The Greek word γένος may indicate this section of a biography (or even a very brief "life"), but may also mean "origin" in the sense of "native city," "family," "ancestry," or "clan"; see e.g. Porph. *Isag.* pp. 1. 18–2. 10 Busse: (a) τὸ Ἡρακλειδῶν . . . γένος ("clan," "family"). (b) ἡ ἐκάστου τῆς γενέσεως ἀρχὴ (b<sup>1</sup>) εἶτε ἀπὸ τοῦ τεκόντος (patronymic) (b<sup>2</sup>) εἶτε ἀπὸ τοῦ τόπου ἐν ᾧ τις γέγονεν, instances for the place-from-where being ethnica (Πίνδαρον μὲν Θηβαῖον εἶναι τὸ γένος, Πλάτωνα δὲ Ἀθηναῖον· καὶ γὰρ ἡ πατρὶς ἀρχὴ τίς ἐστί τῆς ἐκάστου γενέσεως). For the standard information about a person's family, parents and city of origin in encomia, see e.g. Quint. 3. 7.15. Menander Rh. *Περὶ ἐπιδεικτικῶν* pp. 78.18 ff., 174. 20 ff. Russell–Wilson. For biography, see e.g. Nepos, *Epan.* 1. 4, "dicemus primum de genere eius, deinde quibus disciplinis et a quibus sit eruditus," *Alc.* 1. 1–2, *Dion* 1. 1.

<sup>7</sup> *CMG* IV: Soranus, ed. J. Ilberg (Leipzig and Berlin 1927) 175. Tr. J. Rubin Pinault, *Hippocratic Lives and Legends* (Leiden 1992) 7, modified.

Abdera. (4) His *floruit*<sup>8</sup> was during the Peloponnesian wars; he was born in the first year of the eightieth Olympiad [460/59], as Ischomachus says in book one of his *On the Sect of Hippocrates*.

The custom is followed by Porphyry in his *Life of Pythagoras*, a large fragment from his lost *Philosophos Historia*, which combined biography with doxography. He informs us about Pythagoras' father, who according to most authorities was called Mnesarchus, though Douris said his name was Arimnestus and others that his real father was Apollo. Opinions as to Mnesarchus' γένος differed, some saying that he was a Samian, whereas Neanthes, who said he was an immigrant from Tyre who became a Samian citizen, also reported the view that originally he was a Tyrrhenian from Lemnos. A report about Pythagoras' city of origin is cited, according to which there was a dispute whether this was Samos, Phlius or Metapontum. We are also informed about the various traditions concerning his teachers, etc. He is dated by several synchronisms, among which is Polycrates' tyranny at Samos.

But in Porphyry's *On the Life of Plotinus and the Ordering of his Books* important parts of this information are lacking.<sup>9</sup> We are given Plotinus' dates: According to his close friend Eustochius (cited *V. Plot.* 2) he died at the age of sixty-six in 270 C.E., which allows Porphyry to compute the year of birth as 205 C.E. But we are told that Plotinus never revealed the month or day of his birth, though (*V. Plot.* 3) he recounted a story from his childhood of which he was ashamed (he allowed himself to be suckled by his wet-nurse at a comparatively advanced age),<sup>10</sup> and spoke of his education: his disappointment with other teachers of philosophy and his joy in discovering the great Ammonius Saccas, with whom he remained for eleven years. We also hear about his attempt to travel to the East in search of the philosophy of the Persians and Indians, and of his arrival at Rome at the age of forty. This silence about his month and day of birth is typical. It is what one expects after the remarkable opening lines of the *Vita Plotini*:

<sup>8</sup> See my paper, "The Historical Hippocrates and the Origins of Scientific Medicine," in M. Ruse (ed.), *Nature Animated*, Univ. of Western Ontario Ser. in Philos. of Science 21 (Dordrecht 1983) 52 ff.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. L. Brisson et al., *Porphyre. La Vie de Plotin II* (Paris 1992) 191 f. For Porphyry on the various meanings of γένος, see above, note 6.

<sup>10</sup> This confirms that his parents were not poor. As to Plotinus' being ashamed, wet-nurses were seen as a potentially harmful influence; see e.g. Quint. 1. 1. 4 = *SVF* III 734 (on Chrysippus' lullabies) and 1. 1. 16 = *SVF* III 733 (Chrysippus thought three years of suckling were enough).

Plotinus, the philosopher who lived in our time, seemed to be ashamed of being in a body.<sup>11</sup> Because of this attitude he refused to speak of his *origins*, his *parents* and his *native city*.<sup>12</sup>

For this reason, Porphyry is unable to begin his biography in the usual way, that is to say, by listing Plotinus' city of origin, giving the names of his parents or describing the earlier history of his family. This part of the *genos*-element of the biography is lacking, though in a sense it is still there, viz. in the negative sense. Plotinus' refusal to provide this information shows us what sort of man he was, and confirms the observation that he seemed to be ashamed to be in a body. This contempt for his appearance and for his physical condition in general also appears from what Porphyry tells us next about his life and habits.

The *Vita Plotini* is the introduction to Porphyry's edition of the *Enneads*.<sup>13</sup> As is well known, this edition is not in chronological order but according to a systematic arithmological sequence which is explained and justified in this introduction (*V. Plot.* 24–26). The final *Ennead* contains the treatises which deal with the highest subjects. The last of these (6. 9), *On the Good or the One*, is the culmination of the exposition of Plotinus' philosophy according to the design imposed by his editor, though it is a relatively early piece, viz. number nine according to the chronological ordering (*V. Plot.* 4).<sup>14</sup> It had already been composed and distributed among the pupils before Porphyry's arrival in Rome. We should look at its final sentence:<sup>15</sup>

And this is the way of life of gods and of divine and happy men: an escape from the other things, the things here on earth, a way of life which does not take pleasure in the things here on earth, a flight of the alone to the Alone.

The end, or *telos*, as for other Greek philosophers, is well-being,<sup>16</sup> but for Plotinus this consists in leaving behind all earthly things and taking refuge

<sup>11</sup> As A.-J. Festugière, *Corpus Hermeticum* 1 (Paris 1946 and later repr.) 78, points out, keeping the body at the required distance is a "thème banal en Grèce depuis Platon."

<sup>12</sup> οὔτε περὶ τοῦ γένους αὐτοῦ διηγείσθαι ἠνείχετο οὔτε περὶ τῶν γονέων οὔτε περὶ τῆς πατρίδος. A. H. Armstrong's bizarre question (*Plotinus V: Enneads V 1–9* [Cambridge, MA 1984] 38 n. 2), "Did he consider himself inferior to his parents?" is based on a wrong translation of ἐνταῦθα at *Enn.* 5. 1 [10]. 7. 39.

<sup>13</sup> See my *Prolegomena: Questions to be Settled Before the Study of an Author, or a Text* (Leiden 1994) 108 ff., also for references to the literature.

<sup>14</sup> This fact may or may not have contributed to its position of honour: arithmology again ( $9 = 3 \times 3$ ).

<sup>15</sup> *Enn.* 6. 9 [9]. 11. 49–51: καὶ οὗτος θεῶν καὶ ἀνθρώπων θείων καὶ εὐδαιμόνων βίος, ἀπαλλαγὴ τῶν ἄλλων τῶν τῆδε, βίος ἀνήδονος τῶν τῆδε, φυγὴ μόνου πρὸς μόνον. Cf. 5. 1 [10]. 6. 11, on approaching the first principle in prayer, μόνους πρὸς μόνον (cf. below, note 22 and text thereto).

<sup>16</sup> See D. T. Runia, *Bios eudaimoon*, inaugural lecture, Leiden University, 17 Sept. 1993, where he argues that the *telos* often occurs as the climax of philosophical writings.

in the Alone.<sup>17</sup> At *Enneads* 1. 6 [1]. 8. 16 (the earliest treatise according to the chronological ordering), citing part of a Homeric line, he had already said, “let us flee to the beloved fatherland.”<sup>18</sup> Such a “coming home to the fatherland after long wandering” is the reward of “godlike humans” who succeed in raising themselves above the lower world.<sup>19</sup> Behind this expression lies the allegorical interpretation of the *Odyssey*, a quite common motif in Middle Platonist and Neoplatonist philosophy, Odysseus being seen as the human soul which after its wanderings finally comes home to where it belongs.<sup>20</sup>

The final sentence of the *Enneads* agrees and links up with the first sentence of the *Vita*. I believe that this is not a coincidence. In his biography Porphyry describes Plotinus’ way of life as that of an exemplary philosopher who so to speak lived his doctrine,<sup>21</sup> as is clear in retrospect already from the opening words of the *Vita*. The real self is an exile who should not be proud of his body or indulge in the pleasures it affords, for happiness lies elsewhere.

In the treatise which according to the chronological ordering came immediately after the one with which Porphyry’s edition ended, viz. 5. 1 [10], *On the Three Primary Hypostases*, this idea is worked out further and advice as to how to attain the *telos* given. It is quite interesting indeed to read these two tracts in their original order,<sup>22</sup> for in the opening chapter of 5.

<sup>17</sup> P. Hadot, *Plotin. Traité 9* (Paris 1994) 51 (cf. also 217) rightly points out that “Notre traité, et par la volonté de Porphyre [my italics] classant les *Ennéades* dans un ordre systématique, toute l’œuvre de Plotin, se termine sur les mots fameux: ‘fuir seul vers le Seul’.” Yet one should include what is left behind; cf. the use of the “alone – Alone” formula at 1. 6 [1]. 7. 8 ff. and 6. 7 [38]. 34. 6 ff. concerning the soul, and μόνον at 5. 1 [10]. 6. 50 ff. concerning the longing and love of the begotten for its begetter (here Intellect and the One). E. Peterson, “Herkunft und Bedeutung der ΜΟΝΟΣ ΠΡΟΣ ΜΟΝΟΝ-Formel bei Plotin,” *Philologus* 42 (1933) 30, correctly points out: “Der ‘Aufstieg’ [sic—I would prefer “Rückkehr”] ist ein sich ‘Entkleiden’.” Peterson (34 f.) proves that Plotinus uses an originally colloquial formula meaning “without witnesses” or “intimately.” His denial (37 f.) that Numenius fr. 2. 11 ff. des Places (apud Eus. *P.E.* 11. 22. 1) ὁμιλήσαι τῷ ἀγαθῷ μόνῳ μόνον κτλ. provides a precedent for Plotinus’ usage goes too far; see É. J. des Places, *Numénius. Fragments* (Paris 1973) 104, who however misunderstood what Peterson meant.

<sup>18</sup> Φεύγομεν δὴ φίλην ἐς πατρίδα. after *Il.* 2. 140, φεύγομεν σὺν νηυσὶ φίλην ἐς πατρίδα γαίαν (cf. also *Od.* 5. 37, πέμψουσιν δ’ ἐν νηὶ φίλην ἐς πατρίδα γαίαν). See further the observations of V. Cilento, “Mito e poesia nelle *Enneadi* di Plotino,” *Entretiens Hardt V* (Vandœuvres–Genève 1960) 279 f. = V. Cilento, *Saggi su Plotino* (Milano 1973) 217.

<sup>19</sup> *Enn.* 5. 9 [5]. 1. 16 ff., esp. ἐκ πολλῆς πλάνης (cf. *Od.* 1. 1–2, πολλὰ / πλάγχθη) εἰς πατρίδα εὐνόμον ἀφικόμενος ἄνθρωπος.

<sup>20</sup> Numenius fr. 23 des Places apud Porph. *Antr.* 34, Plot. *Enn.* 1. 6 [1]. 8. 16 ff., after the lines cited above, note 18. See F. Buffière, *Les mythes d’Homère et la pensée grecque* (Paris 1956) 413 ff. For precedents in Philo, see P. Boyancé, “Échos des exégèses de la mythologie grecque chez Philon,” in *Philon d’Alexandrie* (Paris 1967) 169 ff., and my “Heraclitus, Empedocles and Others in a Middle Platonist Cento in Philo of Alexandria,” *VChr* 39 (1985) 139, 143, repr. as “Study VII” in my *Studies in Later Greek Philosophy and Gnosticism* (London 1989).

<sup>21</sup> For this widespread motif, see my *Prolegomena* (above, note 13) 183 ff.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. also the uses of the formula “alone – Alone” in 5. 1, cited above, notes 15 and 17.

1 [10] Plotinus tells us what our—and so his own—true *genos* is, that is to say provides the information which when conversing with his pupils he withheld as to “the things here on earth.” The souls have forgotten their *father* (5. 1. 1. 2, πατρὸς θεοῦ), Intellect,<sup>23</sup> and fail to honour themselves through ignorance of their *ancestry*, their *genos* (5. 1. 1. 12, ἀγνοία τοῦ γένους). The point is illustrated by a simile which at first glance looks a bit homely (5. 1. 1. 8–10):

They [sc. the souls] did not know that they themselves too came from hence, just as children immediately torn from their fathers and raised far away do not know who they are and who their fathers are.

But this is a motif from folklore, legend, or myth, whatever name you wish to give to it.<sup>24</sup> One should think of Oedipus, the foundling prince brought up abroad, who knew neither his father nor himself,<sup>25</sup> or of Cyrus, whom

<sup>23</sup> Compare, in this same treatise (5. 1. 7. 27 ff.), the argument concerning the origin of Intellect which cites part of a Homeric line (*Il.* 6. 211 = 20. 241, ταύτης τοι γενεῆς τε καὶ ἀίματος εὐχομαι εἶναι—also quoted by Bion Borysth. apud D.L. 4. 47 = fr. 1A. 12 K., see above, note 1): *ταύτης τοι γενεᾶς* ὁ νοῦς οὗτος κτλ., on which see Cilento (above, note 18) 283 f. = 221. As editors and commentators point out—e.g. Armstrong (above, note 12) 37 n. 1 and M. Atkinson, *Plotinus. Ennead V. 1: On the Three Principal Hypostases* (Oxford 1983) 175—this is quoted from Plat. *Resp.* 8. 547a (both Plotinus and Plato have γενεῆς whereas our text of Homer reads γενεῆς). Plato’s context however is different; στάσις near the half-line in Plato means “civil strife,” in Plotinus “immobility.” Rather than assuming that Plotinus is sloppy I would argue that a purely verbal agreement is sufficient for his purpose.

<sup>24</sup> This has not been observed by the translators and commentators I have seen; for purported parallels and references to the literature dealing with this simile, see the commentary of Atkinson (previous note) 12 f. But at Dio Chrysost. *Or.* 12. 61, Plot. *Enn.* 6. 9 [9], 9. 33 ff. and Procl. *In Tim.* I p. 208.12 f. Diehl the crucial ingredient of forgetting, or ignorance, is lacking. *Enn.* 6. 9 [9]. 7. 32 ff. is better, though here insanity is the cause of the son’s not knowing his father. R. Ferwerda, *La signification des images et des métaphores dans la pensée de Plotin* (Groningen 1965) 76 ff., deals mainly with the “father”-image and points at Gnostic views which are to some extent comparable; cf. e.g. *The Gospel of Truth, NHC* 1.3 24.28 ff. on ignorance and its disappearance. One may also cite *Corp. Herm.* 7, “Ὅτι μέγιστον κακὸν ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἢ περὶ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀγνώσις.

As to literature dealing with the motif of the unknown origin, see J. G. Frazer, *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament* II (London 1919) 437 ff., who discusses and compares a number of instances, e.g. the stories about Moses, Cyrus, Perseus, Telephus, Oedipus, Romulus, and about Prince Karna in the *Mahabharata*. See further M. Delcourt, *Œdipe ou la légende du conquérant*, Bibl. de la Fac. de Philos. et Lettr. Fasc. 104 (Liège 1944; repr. Paris 1981), ch. 1 (1 ff.), “L’enfant exposé,” who adds further examples. In her book *Héphaïstos ou la légende du magicien*, Bibl. de la Fac. de Philos. et Lettr. Fasc. 146 (Liège 1957; repr. Paris 1982) 42 Mme Delcourt summarizes her previous research as being concerned with the “schéma connu” of the “*enfant exposé*, éloigné de ses parents, élevé par des étrangers et promis par là à de hautes destinées” (D.’s italics). Much information is to be found in E. Frenzel, *Motive der Weltliteratur*, 4th ed. (Stuttgart 1992) 340 ff. (“Herkunft, die Unbekannte”), 745 ff. (“Vatersuche”). I am grateful to Peter van der Zwaal for the references in this paragraph.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. the example of the patricide on whose voluntary nature views may differ if the culprit “does not know it is his father whom he kills,” *Enn.* 6. 8 [39, *On the Voluntary*]. 1. 36 ff., εἰ τὸν πατέρα ἠγνόει τοῦτον εἶναι, a clear allusion to the Oedipus legend. Alex. *De Fato* 31, p. 202.18–21 Bruns (= *SVF* II 941), cites a determinist argument (of Stoic origin; see R. W. Sharples, *Alexander on Fate* [London 1983] 166 f., also for parallels) concerned with Oedipus’ killing his father “without knowing (him) and without being known (to him),” ἀγνοῶν τε καὶ

Astyages ordered to be killed but who was raised by humble foster-parents. A more recent example is the piteous hero of Hector Malot's novel *Sans famille*, who at the end of this splendid tear-jerker turns out to be the missing son of an English lord. Knowledge of his *genos* revealed his misery to Oedipus, but Cyrus became King of Kings. Perhaps Plotinus has the happier variety of the motif in mind, although the words he uses appear to be more closely associated with the story of Oedipus.<sup>26</sup> Another and better explanation is that he uses the Oedipus motif without bothering about the part of the story which concerns the patricide. In a similar way, he adapts the tale from "the mysteries and the myths" about Kronos and Zeus to the begetting of Soul by Intellect without bothering about the part of the story dealing with Zeus' dethronement of his father.<sup>27</sup>

At any rate, to assist the soul in overcoming its forgetfulness two ways of addressing men are said to be feasible. One may demonstrate that the things the soul honours here and now are worthless, or teach and remind it how great are its ancestry (5. 1 [10]. 1. 28, γένους) and worth.

Plotinus is consistent, as Porphyry understood very well and made very clear. One's true father is not a human being, as one's true *genos* is not some human family or other, and one's true place of origin is not a πατρὶς somewhere here on earth. To know oneself, and to be known by others, as the person one is, one continuously has to remind oneself, and them, of our real but generally forgotten origin in what lies beyond the world we have come down to. It is this world whose seductions Plotinus wants us to reject

---

ἀγνοούμενος, and which states that a son educated at home would "not have failed to know his parents" (οὐ γὰρ ἂν ποτε . . . ἠγνόησε τοὺς γονεῖς) and so killed one of them and married the other. Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 3. 15 cites Oedipus' incestuous marriage as something horrible which however was "done in ignorance, not by voluntary intention" (ἐπράχθη κατ' ἀγνοίαν, οὐχ ἔκουσῶν γνώμη). The philosophical discussion of human responsibility in connexion with the oracle given to Oedipus' father Laius and its consequences seems to go back to Chrysippus' *De Fato*, see Diogenianus apud Eus. *P.E.* 4. 2. 14 and 4. 3. 12 = *SVF* II 930, Cic. *De Fato* 30 = *SVF* II 956; cf. R. W. Sharples, *Cicero. On Fate (De Fato) and Boethius. The Consolation of Philosophy IV. 5–7, V (Philosophiae Consolationis)* (Warminster 1991) 180 f. But the issue is of course already powerfully expressed by Sophocles, see *OC* 960 ff., esp. 964 ἄκων ("by no choice of mine," tr. Jebb), 975 μηδὲν ξυντιεῖς ὧν ἔδρων εἰς οὓς τ' ἔδρων ("all ignorant what I was doing, and to whom," tr. Jebb). In Homer, *Od.* 11. 272, Iocaste is said to have married her son "in ignorance" (ἀτιδρείησι νόοιο). The discussion was taken up by Platonists before Plotinus, see Alcin. *Didasc.* 17, p. 179.15 ff. Hermann (useful note ad loc. in J. Whittaker and P. Louis, *Alcinoos. Enseignement des doctrines de Platon* [Paris 1990]), Max. Tyr. *Diss.* 13. 5. 122 ff. Trapp, and Calc. *In Tim.* 153, p. 188.9 ff. Waszink, which may derive from a Middle Platonist source. Zeno (in the *Diatribai*, verbatim) and Chrysippus (in the *Politeia*, verbatim) saw no harm in the incestuous marriage; see Sext. *P.* 3. 245–46 and *M.* 11. 191–92 (= *SVF* I 256, III 745).

<sup>26</sup> See previous note and Plut. *De Cur.* 522bc, who sort of rebukes Oedipus for "keeping on trying to find himself" (πάλιν ἑαυτὸν ἐζήτει) as described in the *Oedipus Rex*, i.e. for trying to discover his identity.

<sup>27</sup> *Enn.* 5. 1 [10]. 7. 31 ff., esp. 7. 36 ff.; cf. Atkinson ad loc. (above, note 23) 179, who points out that "Plotinus' use of myth can be very selective."

and which in his view we must flee from even during our temporary sojourn in the body.

*Utrecht University*