



A Note On The Term Noesis In Tractate XIII

Context

In many ways the last line of section 22 of tractate XIII of the Corpus Hermeticum - νοερῶς ἔγνωσ σεαυτὸν καὶ τὸν πατέρα τὸν ἡμέτερον - expresses an important aspect of the Hellenistic hermetic tradition: that "through noesis you have obtained knowledge about yourself and our father" which relates to section 2 of the tractate where the expression σοφία νοερὰ occurs.

However, this aspect has been somewhat neglected since νοερός has usually been and still is translated by English words which now imply and have implied for well over a century philosophical and latterly psychological denotata, abstractions, categories, which I consider are not relevant to the Hellenistic milieu.

In his 1882 translation Chambers used the word 'mind', "Mentally thou hast known thyself and The Father that is ours," [1] while the 1992 translation by Copenhaver was "You know yourself and our father intellectually." [2]

A neglected aspect, because and for instance 'intellectually' now implies 'cleverly', 'by means of certain types of abstractive reasoning or concepts or ideas' with an 'intellectual' perceived as a certain type of person.

My own translation, in *Corpus Hermeticum: Eight Tractates*, [3] is "Through noesis you have obtained knowledge about yourself and our father," using noesis, a transliteration, to suggest a hermetic, a metaphysical, principle which requires contextual interpretation since as I noted in my commentary, the terms νοῦς νοερός, νοῦς οὐσιώδης, and νοῦς ζωτικός are mentioned by Proclus, [4] with νοῦς there and in the Corpus Hermeticum not suggestive of the denotata 'mind', which now has also acquired philosophical and latterly psychological meanings, but of 'perceivation' as in the Poemandres tractate:

φημί ἐγώ, Σὺ γὰρ τίς εἶ; - Ἐγὼ μὲν, φησὶν, εἰμὶ ὁ Ποιμάνδρης, ὁ τῆς αὐθεντίας νοῦς· οἶδα δὲ βούλει, καὶ σύνειμί σοι πανταχοῦ.

φημί ἐγώ, Μαθεῖν θέλω τὰ ὄντα καὶ νοῆσαι τὴν τούτων φύσιν καὶ γινῶναι τὸν θεόν· πῶς, ἔφην, ἀκοῦσαι βούλομαι. - φησὶν ἐμοὶ πάλιν, Ἔχε νῶι σῶι ὅσα θέλεις μαθεῖν, κάγώ σε διδάξω.

I am Poemandres, the perceivation of authority, knowing your desires and eachwhere with you.

I answered that I seek to learn what is real, to apprehend the physis of beings, and to have knowledge of theos. That is what I want to hear. [5]

In summation, noesis is a personal method, a praxis, by which particular knowledge, a particular understanding, can be obtained and in the context of tractate XIII this is of Palingenesis, παλιγγενεσία, acquired "in silence" and which emanation, of theos, "is not taught; rather, it is presenced by and when the theos desires," οὐ διδάσκεται, ἀλλ' ὅταν θέλη, ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀναμνησκεται. [v.2]

As the student describes in v.11:

With a quietude, father, engendered by theos, the seeing is not of the sight from the eyes but that through the noetic actus of the cræft. I am in the Heavens; on Earth; in Water; in Air. I am in living beings, in plants; in the womb, before the womb, after the womb. Everywhere. [6]

Ἀκλινης γενόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, ὧ πάτερ, φαν τάζομαι, οὐχ ὁράσει ὀφθαλμῶν ἀλλὰ τῆ διὰ δυνάμεων νοητικῆ ἐνεργείᾳ. ἐν οὐρανῷ εἶμι, ἐν γῆ, ἐν ὕδατι, ἐν ἀέρι· ἐν ζώοις εἶμι, ἐν φυτοῖς· ἐν γαστρὶ, πρὸ γαστροῦ, μετὰ γαστέρα, πανταχοῦ.

In regard to the word Cræft in the translation, this older spelling in an esoteric context implies (as often in this tractate) a particular *Arte*, the application of particular abilities, skills, and knowledge, especially abilities, skills, and knowledge learned or received in the traditional manner from a master of the *Arte* or *Arts* in question. In this esoteric sense, theos is the Master Craftsman, with Palingenesis being a Cræft, an *Arte* that "is not taught; rather, it is presented by and when the theos desires". The word cræft also has the advantage of implying the plural, such as in the expression the Cræft(s) of theos.

As for Palingenesis, from the Latin palingenesia, English terms such as 'rebirth' or 'regeneration' do not describe what is meant in terms of the context of the *Corpus Hermeticum* which is that mortals become *of* theos, not that they become theos or theoi. This may well explain the reading of the MSS in v.10, ἐθεωρήθημεν, amended by Nock (after Reitzenstein) to ἐθεώθημεν. For it is possible that the hermetic θέωσις implied, in practice, a contemplative type of life; a style of life hinted at in v. 2 - "noetic sapientia is in silence" - and in v. 7 when Hermes says to Thoth, "Go within: and an arriving. Intend: and an engendering. Let physical perceptibility rest, and divinity will be brought-into-being." Cf. Ἀκλινης γενόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ in v. 11.

Hence Palingenesis is not a Buddhist-type of rebirth or of being reborn to eternally live in some place such as Heaven, but an awareness that we are "in the Heavens; on Earth; in Water; in Air [...] in living beings, in plants; in the womb, before the womb, after the womb. Everywhere" and thus that our perception of ourselves as an individual different and distinct from others, human and otherwise, is but an illusion, preventing us understanding theos, our relation to theos, and thus our place in the Cosmos.

Which explains v.7, of the need to "refine yourself, away from the brutish Alastoras of Materies,"

"My son, one Vengeress is Unknowing; the second, Grief. The third, Unrestraint; the fourth, Lascivity. The fifth, Unfairness; the sixth, Coveter. The seventh, Deceit; the eighth, Envy. The ninth, Treachery; the tenth, Wrath. The eleventh, Temerity; the twelfth, Putridity. In number, these are twelve but below them are numerous others who, my son, compel the inner mortal - bodily incarcerated - to suffer because of perceptibility. But they absent themselves - although not all at once - from those to whom theos is generous, which is what the Way and Logos of Palingenesis consists of." [7]

Μία αὕτη, ὧ τέκνον, τιμωρία ἢ ἄγνοια· δευτέρα λύπη· τρίτη ἀκρασία· τετάρτη ἐπιθυμία· πέμπτη ἀδικία· ἕκτη πλεονεξία· ἑβδόμη ἀπάτη· ὀγδόη φθόνος· ἐνάτη δόλος· δεκάτη ὀργή· ἑνδεκάτη προπέτεια· δωδεκάτη κακία· εἰσὶ δὲ αὗται τὸν ἀριθμὸν δώδεκα· ὑπὸ δὲ ταύτας πλείονες ἄλλαι, ὧ τέκνον, διὰ τοῦ δεσμοτηρίου τοῦ σώματος αἰσθητικῶς πάσχειν ἀναγκάζουσι τὸν ἐνδιάθετον ἄνθρωπον· ἀφίστανται δὲ αὗται, οὐκ ἀθρώως, ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐλεηθέντος ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ οὕτω συνίσταται ὁ τῆς παλιγγενεσίας τρόπος καὶ λόγος.

This is similar to the ἄνοδος, the hermetic quest, of the *Peomandres tractate*, v.25, of the journey of the mortal through the seven spheres:

καὶ οὕτως ὁρμᾷ λοιπὸν ἄνω διὰ τῆς ἁρμονίας, καὶ τῆ πρώτῃ ζώνῃ δίδωσι τὴν ἀύξητικὴν ἐνεργείαν καὶ τὴν μειωτικὴν, καὶ τῆ δευτέρᾳ τὴν μηχανὴν τῶν κακῶν, δόλον ἀνεργητὸν, καὶ τῆ τρίτῃ τὴν ἐπιθυμητικὴν ἀπάτην ἀνεργητὸν, καὶ τῆ τετάρτῃ τὴν ἀρχοντικὴν προφανίαν ἀπλεονέκτητον, καὶ τῆ πέμπτῃ τὸ θράσος τὸ ἀνόσιον καὶ τῆς τόλμης τὴν προπέτειαν, καὶ τῆ ἕκτῃ τὰς ἀφορμὰς τὰς κακὰς τοῦ πλοῦτου ἀνεργητῶν, καὶ τῆ ἑβδόμῃ ζώνῃ τὸ ἐνεδρεῦον ψεῦδος.

"Thus does the mortal hasten through the harmonious structure, offering up, in the first realm, that vigour which grows and which fades, and - in the second one - those dishonourable machinations, no longer functioning. In the third, that eagerness which deceives, no longer functioning; in the fourth, the arrogance of command, no longer insatiable; in the fifth, profane insolence and reckless haste; in the sixth, the bad inclinations occasioned by riches, no longer functioning; and in the seventh realm, the lies that lie in wait." [7]

Theos, The Monas, Divinity, The One, And Patriarchy

The expression "through noesis you have obtained knowledge about yourself and our father" - νοερῶς ἔγνωσ σεαυτὸν καὶ τὸν πατέρα τὸν ἡμέτερον - is, in my view comparable to the phrase "quomodo per inferiora superioribus exposita deducantur superiora" of Marsilii Ficini from 1489 CE [8] which itself is a restatement of an expression from the Arabic text *Lawh al-Zumurrud* in *Sirr al-khalīqa* dating from several centuries earlier which I translated as "for the higher is as the lower with the lower as the higher." [9]

Both express important aspects of the esoteric nature of ancient hermeticism whose essence is perhaps expressed by

this section from Lawh al-Zumurrud:

The signs were from The One
As all beings are from The One
Through one design:
The father, the Sun,
The mother, the Moon,
The Pnuema, the womb
The Earth, the nourishment. [9]

As described in tractate XI, v.11:

It is evident someone is so creating and that he is One; for Psyche is one, Life is one, Substance is one. But who is it? Who could it be if not One, the theos? To whom if not to theos alone would it belong to presence life in living beings? Theos therefore is One...

καὶ ὅτι μὲν ἔστι τις ὁ ποιῶν ταῦτα δῆλον· ὅτι δὲ καὶ εἷς, φανερώτατον· καὶ γὰρ μία ψυχὴ καὶ μία ζωὴ καὶ μία ὕλη. τίς δὲ οὗτος; τίς δὲ ἂν ἄλλος εἰ μὴ εἷς ὁ θεός; τίς γὰρ ἄλλωι ἂν καὶ πρέποι ζῶια ἔμψυχα ποιεῖν εἰ μὴ μόνωι τῷ θεῷ; εἷς οὖν θεός.

The One is almost certainly the μονάς, Monas, of tractate IV for in vv.10-11 of that tractate it is stated:

This is the distinction between what is akin and what is different
With what is different having a privation of what is akin.
Since the Monas is the origin and foundation of everything
It is within everything as origin and foundation
For if there is no origin there is nothing
And the origin is not from anything but itself
Since it is the origin of everything else,
Just as the Monas, since it is the origin, enfolds every arithmos [10]
Without itself being enfolded by any,
Begetting every arithmos but not begotten by any.

Everything that is begotten is unfinished, partible,
Liable to decline, resurgence
Which do not befall what is complete
For what is resurgent is resurgence from Monas
But what is brought low is so by its own malady
Because unable to hold Monas.

This, then, Thoth, is the eikon of the theos
Insofar as it can be drawn:
If you - clearly, carefully - and with the eyes of your heart apprehend it
Then I assure you, my son, that you shall find the path to what is above:
In truth, the eikon will guide you
Since the seeing of it is uniquely your own,
For those who attain such a beholding are attentively held, pulled up,
Just as it is said lodestone does with iron.

αὕτη διαφορὰ τοῦ ὁμοίου πρὸς τὸ ἀνόμοιον, καὶ τῷ ἀνομοίωι ὑστέρημα πρὸς τὸ ὅμοιον. ἡ γὰρ μονάς, οὗσα πάντων ἀρχὴ καὶ ρίζα, ἐν πᾶσιν ἐστὶν ὡς ἂν ρίζα καὶ ἀρχή. ἄνευ δὲ ἀρχῆς οὐδὲν, ἀρχὴ δὲ ἐξ οὐδενὸς ἀλλ' ἐξ αὐτῆς, εἴ γε ἀρχὴ ἐστὶ τῶν ἐτέρων. μονάς οὗσα οὖν ἀρχὴ πάντα ἀριθμὸν ἐμπεριέχει, ὑπὸ μηδενὸς ἐμπεριεχομένη, καὶ πάντα ἀριθμὸν γεννᾷ ὑπὸ μηδενὸς γεννωμένη ἐτέρου ἀριθμοῦ.

πᾶν δὲ τὸ γεννώμενον ἀτελὲς καὶ διαιρετόν, καὶ ἀυξητόν καὶ μειωτόν, τῷ δὲ τελείωι οὐδὲν τούτων γίνεται. καὶ τὸ μὲν ἀυξητόν ἀυξάνεται ἀπὸ τῆς μονάδος, ἀλίσκεται δὲ ὑπὸ τῆς αὐτοῦ ἀσθενείας, μηκέτι δυνάμενον τὴν μονάδα χωρῆσαι. αὕτη οὖν, ὧ Τάτ. κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν σοι ὑπογέγραπται τοῦ θεοῦ εἰκῶν· ἦν ἀκριβῶς εἰ θεάσῃ καὶ νοήσῃς τοῖς τῆς καρδίας ὀφθαλμοῖς, πιστευσόν μοι, τέκνον, εὐρήσεις τὴν πρὸς τὰ ἄνω ὁδόν. μᾶλλον δὲ αὐτὴ σε ἢ εἰκῶν ὀδηγήσει. ἔχει γὰρ τι ἴδιον ἢ θέα· τοὺς φθάσαντας θεάσασθαι κατέχει καὶ ἀνέλκει, καθάπερ φασὶν ἢ μαγνήτις λίθος τὸν σίδηρον.

Similarly, the Poemandres tractate states that "phaos and Life formed the father of all beings," [11] with the logical conclusion that the appellations Monas, The One, The Father, Theos, (θεός) and The Theos (ὁ θεός) are equivalent.

As for the Father, an appellation familiar from Christianity, the Poemandres tractate, v.9, is quite explicit:

Theos, the perceivator, male-and-female [ἀρρενόθηλος] being Life and phaos, whose logos brought forth another perceivator, an artisan, who - theos of Fire and pnuema - fashioned seven viziers to surround the perceptible cosmic order in spheres and whose administration is described as fate.

ὁ δὲ Νοῦς ὁ θεός, ἀρρενόθηλος ὢν, ζωὴ καὶ φῶς ὑπάρχων, ἀπεκύησε λόγῳ ἕτερον Νοῦν δημιουργόν, ὃς θεὸς τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ πνεύματος ὢν, ἐδημιούργησε διοικητάς τινας ἑπτά, ἐν κύκλοις περιέχοντας τὸν

αἰσθητὸν κόσμον, καὶ ἡ διοίκησις αὐτῶν εἰμαρμένη καλεῖται.

This male-and-female theos therefore does not seem to be the patriarchal male God of the Old and New Testaments which has led to disputations regarding the meaning of ἀρρενόθηλος, with for instance Copenhaver opting for 'androgynous', Chambers translating 'masculine-feminine' and Nock 'mâle-et-femelle', [12] with the common suggestion that it is an epithet for the unity of apparent opposites, metaphysically in a blending of two different philosophical ancient traditions one of which was Stoicism, the other deriving from Plato [13] and, as I am inclined to favour, alchemically as described and as illustrated in texts such as *De Alchimia Opuscula Complura Veterum Philosophorum* first published in 1550 CE.



ἀρρενόθηλος

Another alternative is 'hermaphrodite' based on the myth of the child of the gods Hermes and Aphrodite, Hermaphroditus who was often associated with matters of a carnal kind, as for example in the myth of the nymph Salmacis.

Whatever the suggestions, there is as far as I know no corollary with the male god of patriarchal traditions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam, for Poemandres goes on to explain in v.14:

When she beheld such unceasing beauty - he who possessed all the vigour of the viziers and was the image of theos - she lovingly smiled, for it was as if in that Water she had seen the semblance of that mortal's beautiful image and, on Earth, his shadow. And as he himself beheld in that Water her image, so similar to his own, he desired her and wanted to be with her. Then, his want and his vigour realized, and he within that image devoid of logos, Physis grasped he whom she loved to entwine herself around him so that, as lovers, they were intimately joined together. [14]

ὄν ἰδοῦσα ἀκόρεστον κάλλος πᾶσαν ἐνέργειαν ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἔχοντα τῶν διοικητόρων τὴν τε μορφήν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐμειδίασεν ἕρωτι, ὡς ἄτε τῆς καλλίστης μορφῆς τοῦ Ἄνθρωπου τὸ εἶδος ἐν τῷ ὕδατι ἰδοῦσα καὶ τὸ σκίασμα ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. ὁ δὲ ἰδὼν τὴν ὁμοίαν αὐτῷ μορφήν ἐν αὐτῇ οὖσαν ἐν τῷ ὕδατι, ἐφίλησε καὶ ἠβουλήθη αὐτοῦ οἰκεῖν· ἅμα δὲ τῇ βουλήν ἐγένετο ἐνέργεια, καὶ ὠίκησε τὴν ἄλογον μορφήν· ἡ δὲ φύσις λαβοῦσα τὸν ἐρώμενον περιεπλάκη ὅλη καὶ ἐμίγησαν· ἐρώμενοι γὰρ ἦσαν.

The personified Physis (φύσις) gives birth to "seven male-and-female mortals" (v.16) who become the seven viziers who surround the perceptible cosmic order in seven spheres. (v. 9)

Hence why I incline toward the view that Theos, (θεός) and The Theos (ὁ θεός) and The Father of several of the tractates of the Corpus Hermeticum are not equivalent to the God of the Christian tradition and that to render ὁ θεός and θεός of such tractates by the term God is a mistake. Hence my somewhat iconoclastic view that the hermeticism of the eight tractates I have translated and commented on [3] are not only far more redolent of Greco-Roman pagan mysticism than they are of early Christianity but also that they, contrary to the modern majority view, may well have influenced early Christianity.

Thus noesis, a personal method, a praxis, by which particular knowledge, a particular understanding, can be obtained, is of and presences that Greco-Roman pagan mysticism and the alchemical tradition that derived from it and which tradition was so well expressed in Lawh al-Zumurrud. [9]

David Myatt
March 2024 CE

[1] John Chambers, *Hermes Trismegistus*, T&T Clark, 1882.

[2] Brian Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, Cambridge University Press, 1992

[3] David Myatt, *Corpus Hermeticum: Eight Tractates*, 2017. (i) Printed edition: ISBN 978-1976452369 (ii) Gratis pdf: <https://davidmyatt.files.wordpress.com/2023/08/eight-tractates-v2-print.pdf>

The Appendix below contains the relevant extract from my *Corpus Hermeticum: Eight Tractates*.

[4] *Procli Diadochi In Platonis Timaeum Commentari*, Volume 5, Book 4, 245-247; *Procli in Platonis Parmenidem Commentaria*, II 733 and IV 887.

[5]

perceiveration. νοῦς. The conventional interpretation here is 'mind', as if in contrast to 'the body' and/or as if some fixed philosophical and abstract principle is meant or implied.

This conventional interpretation is in my view incorrect, being another example of not only retrospective reinterpretation but of using a word which has acquired, over the past thousand years or more, certain meanings which detract from an understanding of the original text. Retrospective reinterpretation because the assumption is that what is being described is an axiomatic, reasoned, philosophy centred on ideations such as Thought, Mind, and Logos, rather than what it is: an attempt to describe, in fallible words, a personal intuition about our existence, our human nature, and which intuition is said to emanate from a supernatural being named Pœmandres.

In addition, one should ask what does a translation such as 'I am Poimandres, mind of sovereignty' [*vide* Copenhaver] actually mean? That there is a disembodied 'mind' which calls itself Pœmandres? That this disembodied 'mind' is also some gargantuan supernatural shapeshifting being possessed of the faculty of human speech? That some-thing called 'sovereignty' has a mind?

I incline toward the view that the sense of the word νοῦς here, as often in classical literature, is perceivance; that is, a particular type of astute awareness, as of one's surroundings, of one's self, and as in understanding ('reading') a situation often in an instinctive way. Thus, what is not meant is some-thing termed 'mind' (or some faculty thereof), distinguished as this abstract 'thing' termed 'mind' has often been from another entity termed 'the body'.

Perceivance thus describes the ability to sense, to perceive, when something may be amiss; and hence also of the Greek word implying resolve, purpose, because one had decided on a particular course of action, or because one's awareness of a situation impels or directs one to a particular course of action. Hence why, in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Sophocles has Creon voice his understanding of the incipient hubris of Oedipus, of his pride without a purpose, of his apparent inability to understand, to correctly perceive, the situation:

εἴ τοι νομίζεις κτῆμα τὴν ἀυθαδίαν
εἶναί τι τοῦ νοῦ χωρὶς, οὐκ ὀρθῶς φρονεῖς.

If you believe that what is valuable is pride, by itself,
Without a purpose, then your judgement is not right.

vv. 549-550

Translating νοῦς as perceivance/perceiveration thus places it into the correct context, given ἀυθεντίας - authority. For "I am Pœmandres, the perceiveration of authority" implies "What [knowledge] I reveal (or am about to reveal) is authentic," so that an alternative translation, in keeping with the hermeticism of the text, would be "I am Pœmandres, the authentic perceivance." [The English word authentic means 'of authority, authoritative' and is derived, via Latin, from the Greek ἀυθεντία]

eachwhere. An unusual but expressive (c.15th century) English word, suited to such an esoteric text. The meaning here is that, like a guardian δαίμων of classical and Hellenic culture, Pœmandres is always close by: eachwhere with you.

[6]

quietude engendered by theos. Ἀκλινης γενόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ. With ἀκλινης understood metaphorically, cf. σοφία νοερά ἐν σιγῇ in v. 2.

the seeing is not of... In respect of φαντάζομαι, cf. XI:18, κεῖται γὰρ ἄλλως ἐν ἄσωμάτῳ φαντασίαι.

through the noetic actusivity of the cræft. τῇ διὰ δυνάμεων νοητικῆ ἐνεργείᾳ. In respect of 'cræft', cf. ἀνακαθαίρομενος ταῖς τοῦ θεοῦ δυνάμεσιν in v. 8. In regard to noetic, qv. the comment on σοφία νοερά in v. 2. In respect of actusivity, qv. the comment on ἐνέργεια in v. 6.

The metaphysical content of this statement, important both in respect of what immediately follows - which bears comparison with XI:18-19 (see below) - and in respect of understanding Palingenesis, has been somewhat lost in previous translations such as "with the mental energy that comes through the powers" and "with the energy the Mind gives me through the powers."

What is meant is that there is a specific type of apprehension which is vivifying, which does not depend on what is seen directly by the eyes, and which is a *cræft*, a capability, an ability, an influencing, arising from the generosity of theos and from that quietude engendered by theos. Thoth then goes on to describe what this apprehension involves: ἐν οὐρανῷ εἶμι, ἐν γῆ, ἐν ὕδατι, ἐν ἀέρι...

I am in the Heavens; on Earth; in Water... Everywhere. ἐν οὐρανῷ εἶμι, ἐν γῆ, ἐν ὕδατι, ἐν ἀέρι...πανταχοῦ. Regarding this, and the aforementioned type of apprehension, cf. tractate XI:18-19,

ἔνια δὲ τῶν λεγομένων ἰδίαν ἔννοιαν ἔχειν ὀφείλει· οἷον ὃ λέγω νόησον· πάντα ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ θεῷ. οὐχ ὡς ἐν τόπῳ κείμενα (ὃ μὲν γὰρ τόπος καὶ σῶμά ἐστι, καὶ σῶμα ἀκίνητον, καὶ τὰ κείμενα κίνησιν οὐκ ἔχει)· κεῖται γὰρ ἄλλως ἐν ἀσωμάτῳ φαντασίαι. νόησον τὸν περιέχοντα τὰ πάντα καὶ νόησον ὅτι τοῦ ἀσωμάτου οὐδὲν ἐστὶ περιοριστικόν, οὐδὲ ταχύτερον, οὐδὲ δυνατώτερον· αὐτὸ δὲ πάντων καὶ ἀπεριόριστον καὶ ταχύτατον καὶ δυνατώτατον.

καὶ οὕτω νόησον ἀπὸ σεαυτοῦ, καὶ κέλευσόν σου τῆι ψυχῆι εἰς Ἰνδικὴν πορευθῆναι, καὶ ταχύτερόν σου τῆς κελεύσεως ἐκεῖ ἔσται. μετελθεῖν δὲ αὐτῆι κέλευσον ἐπὶ τὸν ὠκεανόν, καὶ οὕτως ἐκεῖ πάλιν ταχέως ἔσται, οὐχ ὡς μεταβάσῃ ἀπὸ τόπου εἰς τόπον, ἀλλ' ὡς ἐκεῖ οὔσα. κέλευσον δὲ αὐτῆι καὶ εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀναπτῆναι, καὶ οὐδὲ πτερῶν δεηθήσεται. ἀλλ' οὐδὲ αὐτῆι οὐδὲν ἐμπόδιον, οὐ τοῦ ἡλίου πῦρ, οὐχ ὁ αἰθήρ, οὐχ ἡ δίνη, οὐχὶ τὰ τῶν ἄλλων ἀστέρων σώματα· πάντα δὲ διατεμοῦσα ἀναπτῆσεται μέχρι τοῦ ἐσχάτου σώματος. εἰ δὲ βουληθείης καὶ αὐτὸ ὅλον διαρρήξασθαι καὶ τὰ ἐκτός εἶ γέ τι ἐκτός τοῦ κόσμου θεάσασθαι, ἔξεσί σοι.

Some of the matters spoken of require a certain apprehension, so consider what I say: everything is in the theos but not as if lying in a particular place - since the place is a body and also immovable and what is lain does not move - but an incorporeal representation apprehends what is lain otherwise.

Thus apprehend what embraces everything and apprehend that the incorporeal has no boundary, that nothing is swifter, nothing as mighty, since the incorporeal is boundless, the swiftest, the mightiest.

And apprehend this about yourself and so urge your psyche to go to any land and, swifter than that urging, it will be there. Likewise, urge it to go to the Ocean and again it will be swiftly there without passing from place to place but as if already there.

Urge it to go up into the heavens and it will be there without the need of any wings. Indeed, nothing will impede it: not the fire of the Sun nor Aether, nor the vortex, nor the bodies of the other stars, but - carving through them all - it will go as far as the furthest body. Should you desire to burst through The Entirety and observe what is beyond - if indeed there be anything beyond that ordered system - then it is possible for you.

[7]

brutish. Given the metaphysical context, and the contrast with καθαρός, ἄλογος implies more than 'irrational' or 'unreasonable'. The sense is of the unrefined, the uncultured, the brutish.

alastoras. Since the Greek word τιμωρία is specific and personal, implying vengeance, retribution, and also a divine punishment, it seems apposite to try and keep, in English, the personal sense even though no specific deeds or deeds are mentioned in the text, but especially because of what follows: Τιμωροὺς γὰρ ἐν ἐμαυτῷ ἔχω, ὦ πάτερ. Hence my interpretation, "the brutish alastoras of Materies," using the English term alastoras - singular, *alastor*, from the Greek ἀλάστωρ, an avenging deity, and also a person who avenges certain deeds. Qv. Aeschylus, Agamemnon, 1497-1508.

materies. ὕλη. A variant form of the Latin *materia*, thus avoiding the English word 'matter' which now has connotations, derived from sciences such as Physics, that are not or may not be relevant here. In addition, the term requires contextual, metaphysical, interpretation, for as used here it may or may not be equivalent to the ὕλη of Poemandres 10, of III:1, καὶ τὰ λοιπά. Hence why I have here chosen 'materies' rather than - as in those other tractates - 'substance'.

[8] *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda*, Book III, Chapter XXVI.

[9] Myatt, *Lawh al-Zumurrud*, 2024, <https://davidmyatt.files.wordpress.com/2024/02/dwm-lawh-al-zumurrud.pdf>

[10] In regard to "enfolds every arithmos [...] begetting every arithmos but not begotten by any".

This passage, with its mention of ἀριθμός, is often assumed to refer to the Pythagorean doctrine regarding numbers since ἀριθμός is invariably translated as 'number' - thus implying what the English word implies, especially in mathematical terms - even though Aristotle, in discussing ἀριθμός, wrote: ἄλλος δὲ τις τὸν πρῶτον ἀριθμὸν τὸν τῶν εἰδῶν ἓνα εἶναι, ἔνιοι δὲ καὶ τὸν μαθηματικὸν τὸν αὐτὸν τοῦτον εἶνα (Metaphysics, Book XIII, 1080b.20).

Given such a necessary distinction - and the discussion regarding ἀριθμός and Pythagoras in Book XIII, 1083b.10 et seq - as well as the fact that what ἀριθμός means here, in this tractate, and what it implies - such as the mathematical numbers 2 and 3 developing from the One - is not mentioned, I have transliterated ἀριθμός thus leaving open what it may or may not mean in relation to the particular weltanschauung being described. However, the context seems to suggest a metaphysical rather than an abstract mathematical notion, especially given what follows at the beginning of section 11: πᾶν δὲ τὸ γεννώμενον ἀτελὲς καὶ διαιρετόν.

[11]

Yet why, according to the logos of theos, does the one of self-discovery progress within themselves?

To which I replied, phaos and Life formed the father of all beings, from whence that human came into being.

You express yourself well. For phaos and Life are the theos and the father from whence the human came into being. Therefore if you learn to be of Life and phaos - and that you perchance are of them - then you progress to return to Life. Thus spoke Pœmandres.

Can you - who are my perceivation - therefore tell me how I may progress to Life? For does not theos say that the human of perceivation should have self-knowledge?

κατὰ τί δὲ «ὁ νοήσας ἑαυτὸν εἰς αὐτὸν χωρεῖ», ὅπερ ἔχει ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ λόγος; - φημί ἐγώ, Ὅτι ἐκ φωτὸς καὶ ζωῆς συνέστηκεν ὁ πατήρ τῶν ὄλων, ἐξ οὗ γέγονεν ὁ ἄνθρωπος. - Εὖ φηίς λαλῶν· φῶς καὶ ζωὴ ἐστὶν ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατήρ, ἐξ οὗ ἐγένετο ὁ ἄνθρωπος. ἐὰν οὖν μάθῃς αὐτὸν ἐκ ζωῆς καὶ φωτὸς ὄντα καὶ ὅτι ἐκ τούτων τυγχάνεις, εἰς ζωὴν πάλιν χωρήσεις. ταῦτα ὁ Ποιμάνδρης εἶπεν - Ἄλλ' ἔτι μοι εἶπέ, πῶς εἰς ζωὴν χωρήσω ἐγώ, ἔφην, ὦ Νοῦς ἐμός; φησὶ γὰρ ὁ θεός· «ὁ ἔννοους ἄνθρωπος ἀναγνωρισάτω ἑαυτόν».

[12] A.D. Nock & A.-J. Festugiere, *Corpus Hermeticum*, Third Edition, 1972

[13] The problem here with such metaphysical explanations is that they assume there were specific supra-personal traditions or schools of thought distinctive enough to be taught and transmitted and later described by a term such as Stoicism, just as it has been assumed the texts of the Corpus Hermeticum represented a hermetic tradition whereas I am inclined toward the view that many if not most of the tractates present the personal weltanschauung of their authors germane to their time. That is, that rather than being representative of some axiomatical pre-existing philosophy or of some school of thought, they reproduce the insight and the understanding of individuals regarding particular metaphysical matters; an insight and an understanding no doubt somewhat redolent of, and possibly influenced by, and sometimes perhaps paraphrasing, some such existing philosophies and/or some such schools of thought; and an insight which often differs from tractate to tractate.

[14]

Physis grasped [...] intimately joined together. ἡ δὲ φύσις λαβοῦσα τὸν ἐρώμενον περιεπλάκη ὅλη καὶ ἐμίγησαν ἐρώμενοι γὰρ ἦσαν. The sense of μίγνυμι here is that of a physical union, a sexual joining together - not of some 'philosophical mingling' of 'forms'. Similarly, περιπλέκω is not some ordinary 'embrace' but a sexual twinning (of limbs). Cf. Hesiod, Theogony, 375 - Κρίω δ' Εὐρυβίην τέκεν ἐν φιλότῃτι μιγεῖσα Ἄστραϊόν.

Appendix

Section 22 Of Tractate XIII

Text

Εὐχαριστῶ σοι, πάτερ, ταῦτά μοι αἰνεῖν εὐξαμένω.

Χαίρω, τέκνον, καρποφορήσαντος ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας τὰ ἀγαθὰ, τὰ ἀθάνατα γενήματα. τοῦτο μαθὼν παρ' ἐμοῦ τῆς ἀρετῆς σιγὴν ἐπάγγειλαι, μηδενί, τέκνον, ἐκφαί νων τῆς παλιγγενεσίας τὴν παράδοσιν, ἵνα μὴ ὡς διάβολοι λογισθῶμεν. ἰκανῶς γὰρ ἕκαστος ἡμῶν ἐπεμελήθη, ἐγώ τε ὁ λέγων, σύ τε ὁ ἀκούων. σερῶς ἔγνωσ σεαυτὸν καὶ τὸν πατέρα τὸν ἡμέτερον.

Translation

My thanks to you, father, for your advice regarding the invocation.

My son, I am glad that the actuality has borne good fruit, the unrottable produce. Having learned of this from me, profess silence my son about this wonder, revealing to no one the tradition of the Palingenesis, for otherwise we will be regarded as rouners. Each of us has had a sufficiency of interest: I in speaking, you in listening. Through noesis you

have obtained knowledge about yourself and our father.

Commentary

invokation. εὐχομαι. Not 'pray' - which has too many Christian and other non-Hellenic religious connotations - but invokation, as in appeal to a deity, to call upon, to offer a laudation or an offering. Qv. Aeschylus, Agamemnon, 933, ἠΰξω θεοῖς δείσας ἂν ὧδ' ἔρδειν τάδε, did you invoke the gods because you feared doing such things?

the unrottable produce. τὰ ἀθάνατα γενήματα. Literally, "the deathless/immortal produce". Taking ἀθάνατος metaphorically contrasts well

with the preceding 'bearing good fruit'. the tradition. In respect of παράδοσις, cf. παραδιδόναι μοι in v. 1. As there, the suggestion is of a disclosing of some ancestral teaching or wisdom; the disclosing by a teacher or master to a pupil.

rouners. For 'rouner' in respect of διάβολος, qv. v. 13, εἰς ὃν ὑπεμνηματι σάμην ἵνα μὴ ὦμεν διάβολοι τοῦ παντὸς εἰς τοὺς πολλούς.

<quote>

rouner. διάβολος. In regard to the Old English word *rouner* - denoting a person who whispers secrets or who spreads rumours in a secretive, disruptive, manner - qv. the Prologue of the 14th century *Cloud Of Unknowing*: Fleschely janglers, opyn preisers and blamers of hemself or of any other, tithing tellers, rouners and tutilers of tales.

Also, cf. 2 Timothy 3:3, ἄστοργοι, ἄσπονδοι, διάβολοι, ἀκρατεῖς (unloving, unforgiving, rouners, unrestrained) where mention is made of ἀκρατής, which in this tractate is personified as one of the Alastoras.

I take the following τοῦ παντὸς as referring to keeping the silence - the secrets - as mentioned in v. 22, rather than as referring to the preceding τὸ πᾶν.

</quote>

noesis. A technical, mystical, term, qv. the comment on 'noetic sapientia' in v. 2:

<quote>

noetic sapientia. For a variety of reasons, I have used the term *noetic sapientia* to denote σοφία νοερὰ.

i) The metaphysical terms νοῦς νοερός, νοῦς οὐσιώδης, and νοῦς ζωτικός occur in Proclus, qv. *Procli Diadochi In Platonis Timaeum Commentari*, Volume 5, Book 4, 245-247; *Procli in Platonis Parmenidem Commentaria*, II 733 and IV 887. Interestingly, Proclus associates νοερός with the three 'septenary planets' Mercury, Venus, and the Sun.

Here, σοφία νοερὰ may well suggest a particular hermetic principle which requires contextual interpretation.

ii) As noted in my commentary on Poemandres 29 - where I used the Latin *sapientia* in respect of σοφία - in some contexts the English word 'wisdom' does not fully reflect the meaning (and the various shades) of σοφία, especially in a metaphysical (or esoteric) context given what the English term 'wisdom' now, in common usage and otherwise, often denotes. As in the Poemandres tractate *sapientia* (for σοφία) requires contextual - a philosophical - interpretation, as Sophia (for σοφία) does in tractate XI where it is there suggestive, as with Aion, Kronos, and Kosmos, of a personified metaphysical principle.

iii) In respect of νοερός, the English word 'intellectual' has too many irrelevant modern connotations, with phrases such as 'intellectual wisdom' and 'the wisdom that understands' - for σοφία νοερὰ - unhelpful regarding suggesting a relevant philosophical meaning. Hence the use of the term 'noetic' which suggests a particular type of apprehension - a perceiviation - whereby certain knowledge and a particular understanding can be ascertained.

Thus, *noetic sapientia* implies that the knowledge and understanding that is noetically acquired transcends - or at least is different from - that acquired both (a) through observation of and deductions concerning phenomena and (b) through the use of denotatum whereby beings are given 'names' and assigned to abstractive categories with such naming and such categories assumed to provide knowledge and understanding of the physis of those beings. [In respect of physis, qv. the comment on φύσεως μιᾶς in section 12.]

In addition, given what follows - ἐν σιγῇ, 'in silence' - such knowledge and understanding does not require nor depend upon words whether they be spoken or written or thought. Hence, the 'source' of mortals is in, can be known and understood through, the silence of noetic sapientia.

</quote>

All translations by DW Myatt

Image credit:

The beginning of tractate XIII from the book *Mercvrii Trismegisti Pœmandres*, published in Paris in 1554

This work is published under the
Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International license