

Hermetic Rebirth through the Heavenly Spheres in *CH* XIII

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Hermetic Rebirth through the Heavenly Spheres in *CH XIII*

Akindynos Kaniamos¹

I. Introduction

Since the publication of pioneering works by Reitzenstein, Scott, Nock and Festugière during the first half of the twentieth century,² *Corpus Hermeticum XIII, On Rebirth* has received considerable scholarly attention, though the cosmological components of its fundamental rationale have not yet been fully deciphered.³ Rebirth and divinization through the heavenly and supracosmic spheres are key concepts in Hermetism. Despite some doctrinal inconsistencies in the description of this process, scholars such as Jean-Pierre Mahé and Garth Fowden have both argued that the ‘way of Hermes’ was more concerned with progressive spiritual formation than with a definite doctrinal truth.⁴ In *CH XIII*, Hermes acts as the mystagogue guiding his disciple into a state of a mystical rebirth: he summons ten divine powers (δυνάμεις) to enter into Tat and drive out the twelve torments (τιμωρία) inherent in Tat’s physical body.⁵ Their removal, together with the arrival of the δυνάμεις,

¹ I would like to express my warmest gratitude to Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum for her precious remarks and comments on the first draft of this paper. I would also like to thank the blind reviewer and the participants in the Athens conference for their critiques, commentaries and suggestions.

² Reitzenstein 1904; Scott I-IV 1924-1936; Nock-Festugière I-IV 1945-1954; Festugière 2014 [I-IV, 1944-1954¹].

³ For a comprehensive review of the previous scholarship on *CH XIII*, along with original insights, see Festugière (2014) 1253-1258 [III, 153-158]; 1626-1693 [IV, 200-267]; Grese (1979); Van den Kerchove (2012) 324-362; Bull (2018) 244-315; Hanegraaff (2022) 220-263. For recent publications on the cosmological and astrological components of the *Hermetica*, see Larsen (2008) 80-117; Wildberg (2020) 580-604.

⁴ Mahé (1982) 455-456; Fowden (1986) 110-112; Mahé (2019) LXXI-LXXIV.

⁵ Heinrici (1918) 37-38 and Grese (1979) 112, n. 294 examine in parallel the list of the twelve torments with similar ones in the New Testament. Van den Kerchove (2012) 340, n. 45 cites similar lists in Diogenes Laertius and Epictetus.

transforms Tat into a divine being. The twelve τιμωρίαι are explicitly transposed to a cosmological and astrological context as they stand for the zodiacal circle, which is constituted, as Hermes explains, of ‘entities that are twelve in number, one in nature, omniform in appearance’.⁶ Nevertheless, a comparison between the two lists suggests that the first seven of these δυνάμεις (γνώσις θεοῦ, γνώσις χαρᾶς, ἐγκράτεια, καρτερία, δικαιοσύνη, κοινωνία, ἀλήθεια) correspond to the virtues opposing the first seven τιμωρίαι/vices (ἄγνοια, λύπη, ἀκρασία, ἐπιθυμία, ἀδικία, πλεονεξία, ἀπάτη), possibly suggesting an alternative set of cosmological correspondences, which will be explored in this paper.

I shall attempt to demonstrate that the process of divinization in CH XIII may entail the ascent through the seven heavenly spheres in a rather cryptic manner. Initially, focus will be placed on the powers attributed to the planetary gods in Hermetism. Besides their connection with astral fatalism, these powers may also convey pure cosmic energies which, when not distorted by materiality, can be experienced by the soul as gifts, or archetypal life situations in accordance with the heavenly emanations. Subsequently, the cosmological context of CH XIII will be explored, particularly from the angle of the Platonic and Pythagorean tradition. I shall examine the core of the transformative experience of rebirth in order to highlight the modes of enunciation of this experience, as well as the correspondences with the cosmology and anthropology of the *Poimandres* (CH I). Consequently, the establishment of analogies between the first seven pairs of powers/torments and the seven heavenly spheres will be attempted. The planetary order suggested in CH XIII will be viewed as a unique planetary sequence which presents similarities with the planetary order in the *Korē Kosmou* (SH XXIII. 28-29). In the context of the proposed planetary order, possible objections pertaining to the choice of specific words in the list of powers/torments will be discussed. Finally, I shall argue that the heavenly spheres operate not only as orchestrators of Fate (εἰμαρμένη), but also, in their pure *essence*, as divine agencies propelling the soul to reinvent the cosmos within its intelligible dimension.

⁶ CH XIII. 12 Nock-Festugière, tr. Copenhaver (1992). For the ‘Omniform’ (omniformis) god residing in the zodiacal circle, see *Ascl.* 35.

II. The Powers of the Planets in Hermetism

According to the doctrine of the inexorable astral influence upon human destiny which flourished in Late Antiquity, the seven heavenly spheres were initially associated with Fate and corporeal passions, since, before entering the body, the soul acquired qualities linked to each planet.⁷ These qualities would later be experienced in a distorted manner because of the corporeal condition of the human being. This process of the planets conveying and imposing Fate upon mortals is described in several Hermetic texts.⁸ In the *Poimandres*, divinization is preceded by the ascent through the heavenly spheres, which entails the removal of vices corresponding to each of the seven planets:⁹

CH I. 25-26

25. Thence the human being rushes up through the cosmic framework, at the first zone surrendering the energy of increase and decrease (τὴν αὐξητικὴν ἐνέργειαν καὶ τὴν μειωτικὴν); at the second evil machination (τὴν μηχανὴν τῶν κακῶν), a device now inactive; at the third the illusion of longing (τὴν ἐπιθυμητικὴν ἀπάτην), now inactive; at the fourth the ruler's arrogance (τὴν ἀρχοντικὴν προφανίαν), now freed of excess; at the fifth unholy presumption (τὸ θράσος τὸ ἀνόσιον) and daring recklessness (τῆς τόλμης τὴν προπέτειαν); at the sixth the evil impulses that come

⁷ For a summary of these qualities in representative texts from Late Antiquity, see Culianu (1983) 48-54. For astrological fatalism, see Bouché-Leclercq (1899) 593-598; Cumont (1911) 179-182.

⁸ Among the most representative Hermetic texts conveying astral fatalism, see CH I.9; CH I.25; CH XVI.13-16; SH XII.2.

⁹ CH I.25-26: καὶ οὕτως ὀρμᾶ λοιπὸν ἄνω διὰ τῆς ἁρμονίας, καὶ τῆ πρώτῃ ζώνῃ δίδωσι τὴν αὐξητικὴν ἐνέργειαν καὶ τὴν μειωτικὴν, καὶ τῆ δευτέρᾳ τὴν μηχανὴν τῶν κακῶν, δόλον ἀνενέργητον, καὶ τῆ τρίτῃ τὴν ἐπιθυμητικὴν ἀπάτην ἀνενέργητον, 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 ἀνενεργήτους, καὶ τῆ ἑβδόμῃ ζώνῃ τὸ ἐνεδρεῦον ψεῦδος. καὶ τότε γυμνωθεὶς ἀπὸ τῶν τῆς ἁρμονίας ἐνεργημάτων γίνεται ἐπὶ τὴν ὀγδοατικὴν φύσιν, τὴν ἰδίαν δύναμιν ἔχων, καὶ ὑμνεῖ σὺν τοῖς οὐσί τὸν πατέρα· συγχάιρουσι δὲ οἱ παρόντες τῆ τούτου παρουσίᾳ, καὶ ὁμοιωθεὶς τοῖς συνοῦσιν ἀκούει καὶ τινῶν δυνάμεων ὑπὲρ τὴν ὀγδοατικὴν φύσιν φωνῆ τινὶ ἡδέϊα ὑμνουσῶν τὸν θεόν· καὶ τότε τάξει ἀνέρχονται πρὸς τὸν πατέρα, καὶ αὐτοὶ εἰς δυνάμεις ἑαυτοὺς παραδιδόασι, καὶ δυνάμεις γενόμενοι ἐν θεῷ γίνονται. τοῦτο ἐστὶ τὸ ἀγαθὸν τέλος τοῖς γυνῶσιν ἐσχηκόσι, θεωθῆναι.

from wealth (τὰς ἀφορμὰς τὰς κακὰς τοῦ πλούτου), now inactive; and at the seventh zone the deceit that lies in ambush (τὸ ἐνεδρεῦον ψεῦδος). 26. And then, stripped of the effects of the cosmic framework, the human enters the region of the ogdoad; he has his own proper power, and along with the blessed he hymns the father. Those present there rejoice together in his presence, and, having become like his companions, he also hears certain powers that exist beyond the ogdoadic region and hymn god with sweet voice. They rise up to the father in order and surrender themselves to the powers, and, having become powers (δυνάμεις), they enter into god. This is the final good for those who have received knowledge: to be made god (θεωθῆναι). (tr. Copenhagen)

The text follows the Chaldean order of the planets.¹⁰ In this passage, Lars Larsen has compared the vices associated with each heavenly sphere with possible detrimental outcomes of planetary powers in texts of Hellenistic astrology, especially from Ptolemy and Vettius Valens, and has pointed out striking similarities between them.¹¹

The other important text which entails cosmic ascent is the ‘Discourse of the Eighth and the Ninth’ (*Disc. 8-9*, NHC VI, 6). The *Disc. 8-9* describes in dialogue form the process by which a spiritual guide, most likely Hermes, leads an initiate to the mystical experience of ascent into the Eighth and Ninth Spheres, those laying beyond the seven heavenly spheres. Mahé remarked that in the *Disc. 8-9* the initiation focuses on the entrance into the Eighth and Ninth spheres, since the passage through the first seven spheres had already been accomplished; conversely, in CH XIII the disciple receives guidance to ascend throughout all levels of initiation; he nevertheless considered both texts to be reflective of the same trope of rebirth.¹² Christian Bull has more recently viewed them as representing two distinct ritual stages of initiation.¹³

The mystagogue’s reference to the hebdomad (‘we have already reached the hebdomad’)¹⁴ in the text represents the state of

¹⁰ Moon-Mercury-Venus-Sun-Mars-Jupiter-Saturn.

¹¹ Larsen (2008) 90-93.

¹² Mahé (1978) 44-47.

¹³ Bull (2018) 244-248 suggests that the Ascent of CH XIII is an ‘idealized representation of a ritual’ and undertakes the task of analyzing it as a rite of passage that reflects the tripartite structure suggested by the classic studies of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner: *separation, liminality* and *incorporation*.

¹⁴ *Disc. 8-9*, NHC VI.6, 56.27, tr. Brashler/Dirkse/Parrot in Robinson 1978.

consciousness that the disciple has already achieved during the previous stages,¹⁵ and now has to leave behind before receiving the sacred teaching which would allow entrance into the Ogdoad. This seems to imply that a redefinition of the disciple's relationship with the seven planets has already occurred. This idea is highlighted by the two sets of *nomina barbara* in the text, sequences of the seven vowels standing for the seven known planets in Antiquity, appearing before and after the visionary ascent.¹⁶ The vowels probably follow the Chaldean planetary order Moon-Mercury-Venus-Sun-Mars-Jupiter-Saturn, with: alpha (α) standing for the Moon, epsilon (ε) for Mercury, êta (η) for Venus, iota (ι) for the Sun, omicron (ο) for Mars, upsilon (υ) for Jupiter and omega (ω) corresponding to Saturn, as well as to the layer of the fixed stars.¹⁷ As Bull discloses, 'The number of vowels in the two series indicates that they are indeed meant to symbolize the seven planets and the thirty-six Decans'.¹⁸

The *Korē Kosmou* (SH XXIII. 28-29), as well as SH XXIX which is an astrological poem written in dactylic hexameter, display an alternative set of powers attributed to the heavenly gods. In the *Korē Kosmou* the celestial gods are depicted as bestowing gifts to humans, while in SH XXIX they represent essential aspects of the human experience, rendering it akin to the variety of the heavenly emanations. The difference of perspective between the *Korē Kosmou* and the *Poimandres* is due to the fact that the planetary gifts of the *Korē Kosmou* precede the creation of the human body, while the vices of CH I.25 result from the intemperance of corporeal drives. In the *Korē Kosmou*, once the 'Lord and God of the Universe' (κύριος καὶ θεός τῶν ὅλων) had decided to punish the souls for their audacity (τόλμα)¹⁹ by the creation

¹⁵ *Disc.* 8-9, NHC VI.6, 54.27-28, 56.27. For a similar reading of the reference to the hebdomad as purification from vices associated with the seven planets, see Lanzillotta (2021) 57-58.

¹⁶ *Disc.* 8-9, NHC VI.6, 56.17-22 & 61.10-15.

¹⁷ Bull (2017) 75-94; Bull (2018) 333-353. On vowels in general, cf. Dornseiff (1922) 35-39, 82-83; on vowels and planets, see Gundel (1968) 41-43; Godwin (1991) 19-25.

¹⁸ Bull (2017) 80.

¹⁹ Τόλμα (audacity) is similarly used by Plotinus in *Enn.* V.1 [10], 1.4 Henry-Schwyzler, in order to designate, along with generation and primary difference, the starting point of the evil afflicted upon the individual souls, that is to say their descent into materiality.

of the physical formation of human beings, he asked Hermes to summon the planetary gods so that each one of them might convey some form of assistance to a newborn humanity:²⁰

SH XXIII 28-29

The **Sun** spoke: ‘I will shine all the more.’ **Moon** promised to light up her course in Sun’s wake. She added that she had already engendered Fear, Silence, Sleep, and Memory that would be useful to human beings.²¹ **Saturn** announced that he was already the father of Justice and Necessity. **Jupiter** spoke: ‘So that the future race might not totally devote themselves to war, I have already fathered for their benefit Fortune, Hope and Peace.’ **Mars** said that he was already the father of Struggle, Wrath, and Strife. **Venus** asserted without hesitation: ‘To them, Master, I will yoke Desire, Pleasure, and Laughter so that the souls akin to me, who suffer the most horrid condemnation, might not be punished beyond measure.’ God was greatly pleased, my child, when Venus said this. ‘And I will make human nature,’ **Mercury** said, ‘and entrust to them Wisdom, Moderation, Persuasion, and Truth. I will not cease to join with Invention. Moreover, I will forever benefit the mortal life of future humans born under my zodiacal signs’ (tr. Litwa)

In SH XXIX, the planetary powers are interiorized (ἔστι δ’ ἐν ἡμῖν) and presented as qualities which are either related to mortal forms of happiness or akin to archetypal life situations. The poem portrays the planets providing their own distinctive traits to human beings, who are

²⁰ SH XXIII. 28-29: ἔλεγεν Ἥλιος· «Ἐπὶ πλέον λάμψω». ὑπισχνεῖτο Σελήνη τὸν μετὰ τὸν ἥλιον δρόμον φωτίσαι· ἔλεγε καὶ προπεπαιδοποιηκέναι Φόβον καὶ Σιγὴν καὶ Ὑπνον καὶ τὴν μέλλουσαν αὐτοῖς ἔσεσθαι ἂν ὠφελῇ Μνήμην. Κρόνος ἀπήγγειλεν ἤδη πατὴρ γεγονέναι καὶ Δίκης καὶ Ἀνάγκης. Ζεὺς ἔλεγεν· «Ὡς μὴ παντάσῃ πολεμῆσαι τὸ φῦλον τὸ ἐσόμενον, ἤδη αὐτοῖς καὶ Τύχην καὶ Ἐλπίδα καὶ Εἰρήνην γεγέννηκα». Ἄρης Ἀγωνίας ἔλεγεν ἤδη καὶ Ὅργης καὶ Ἐριδος πατὴρ εἶναι. Ἀφροδίτη οὐκ ἐμέλλησεν, ἀλλὰ εἶπεν· «Ἐγὼ δὲ Πόθον αὐτοῖς, ὃ δέσποτα, καὶ Ἥδον ἐπιζεύξω καὶ Γέλωτα, ὡς μὴ χαλεπωτάτην αἰ συγγενεῖς ψυχαὶ τὴν καταδίκην ὑπομένουσαι ἐπὶ πλέον κολάζονται». ἐτέρπετο, ὃ τέκνον, [ἐπὶ πλέον] Ἀφροδίτης ταῦτα λεγούσης. «Ἐγὼ δέ», εἶπεν Ἑρμῆς, «καὶ ποιήσω τὴν ἀνθρώπων φύσιν, ἔφην, καὶ Σοφίαν αὐτοῖς καὶ Σωφροσύνην καὶ Πειθῶ καὶ Ἀλήθειαν ἀναθήσω καὶ οὐ παύσομαι τῆ Εὐρέσει συνών, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ὑπὸ ζῳδίων τῶν ἐμῶν γινομένων ἀνθρώπων εἰσαεὶ τὸν θνητὸν βίον ὠφελήσω ».

²¹ Reading, with Holzhausen and Litwa, ἂν ὠφελῇ. FP reads ἀνωφελῆ, ‘useless’.

infused by all planets by means of the ‘aetherial breath’, the pure upper air of the cosmos:²²

SH XXIX [Περὶ εἰμαρμένης·] Ἑρμοῦ.

Seven much-wandering stars turn round the Olympian threshold, and with them time ever travels: Moon shining in the night, sullen Saturn, sweet Sun, the Paphian who bears the bridal bed, violent Mars, well-winged Mercury, and Jupiter the progenitor, origin of nature’s bloom. These same stars have obtained by lot the race of mortals. Within us there are (ἔστι δ’ ἐν ἡμῖν) Moon, Jupiter, Mars, the Paphian, Saturn, Sun, and Mercury. From their influence, we are allotted to draw from the aetherial breath tears, laughter, rage, reproduction, reason, sleep, and desire. The tears are Saturn, Zeus is reproduction, Mercury is reason, anger is Mars, Moon is sleep, Cytheria desire, Sun is laughter – for by him all mortal intelligence rightly laughs together with the infinite cosmos. (tr. Litwa slightly modified)

A recapitulation of the powers attributed to the heavenly gods in the three above-mentioned texts:

²² SH XXIX Ἑπτὰ πολυπλανέες κατ’ Ὀλύμπιον ἀστέρες οὐδὸν εἰλεῦνται, μετὰ τοῖσιν αἰεὶ δ’ ἐπινίσσεται αἰὼν· νυκτιφανῆς Μῆνη, στυγνὸς Κρόνος, Ἥλιος ἠδύς, παστοφόρος Παφίη, θρασὺς Ἄρης, εὐπτερος Ἑρμῆς, καὶ Ζεὺς ἀρχιγένεθλος, ἀφ’ οὗ φύσις ἐβλάστησεν. Οἱ δ’ αὐτοὶ μερόπων ἔλαχον γένος, ἔστι δ’ ἐν ἡμῖν Μῆνη, Ζεὺς, Ἄρης, Παφίη, Κρόνος, Ἥλιος, Ἑρμῆς· τοῦνεκ’ ἀπ’ αἰθερίου μεμερίσμεθα πνεύματος ἔλκειν δάκρυ, γέλωτα, χόλον, γένεσιν, λόγον, ὕπνον, ὄρεξιν. Δάκρυ μὲν ἐστὶ Κρόνος, Ζεὺς <δ’> ἡ γένεσις, λόγος Ἑρμῆς, θυμὸς Ἄρης, Μῆνη δ’ ἄρ’ ὕπνος, Κυθήρεια δ’ ὄρεξις, Ἥελίος τε γέλως· τούτῳ γὰρ ἅπαντα δικαίως καὶ θνητῇ διάνοια γελᾷ καὶ κόσμος ἀπείρων.

PLANETARY CORRESPON- DENCE	<u>SH XXIII. 28-29</u> GIFTS	<u>SH XXIX</u> QUALITIES	<u>CH I. 25</u> VICES
The Sun (Ἡλιος)	Ἐπὶ πλέον λάμψω	ἠδύς, γέλως	τὴν ἀρχοντικὴν προφάνειαν
The Moon (Σελήνη, Μήνη)	μετὰ τὸν ἥλιον δρόμον φωτίσαι· Φόβος, Σιγή, Ὕπνος καὶ Μνήμη	νυκτιφανής, ὕπνος	τὴν αὐξητικὴν ἐνέργειαν καὶ τὴν μειωτικὴν
Mars (Ἄρης)	Ἀγωνίας ἔλεγεν ἤδη καὶ Ὀργῆς καὶ Ἐριδος πατὴρ εἶναι	θρασὺς, θυμὸς, χόλον	τὸ θράσος τὸ ἀνόσιον καὶ τῆς τόλμης τὴν προπέτειαν
Venus (Ἀφροδίτη, Παφίη, Κυθήρεια)	Ἐγὼ δὲ Πόθον αὐτοῖς καὶ Ἡδονὴν ἐπιζεύξω καὶ Γέλωτα	Παστοφόρος, ὄρεξις	τὴν ἐπιθυμητικὴν ἀπάτην
Saturn (Κρόνος)	πατὴρ γεγονέναι καὶ Δίκης καὶ Ἀνάγκης	στυγνὸς, δάκρυ	τὸ ἐνεδρεῦον ψεῦδος
Jupiter (Ζεὺς)	Τύχην καὶ Ἐλπίδα καὶ Εἰρήνην γεγέννηκα	ἀρχιγένεθλος (ἀφ' οὗ φύσις ἐβλάστησεν), γένεσις	τὰς ἀφορμὰς τὰς κακὰς τοῦ πλοῦτου
Mercury (Ἑρμῆς)	καὶ ποιήσω τὴν ἀνθρώπων φύσιν καὶ Σοφίαν αὐτοῖς καὶ Σωφροσύνην καὶ Πειθῶ καὶ Ἀλήθειαν ἀναθήσω καὶ οὐ παύσομαι τῇ Εὐρέσει συνῶν	εὐπτερος, λόγος	τὴν μηχανὴν τῶν κακῶν, δόλον

III. The Cosmological Context of CH XIII

As John Dillon eloquently suggests, behind the elaborate metaphysical constructions of Hermetists lie certain types of Platonism, to such an extent that he justly included Hermetism in his famous ‘Platonic Underworld’.²³ CH XIII embraces several Platonic and Pythagorean doctrines. Let us first turn our attention to the cosmological context of the treatise. CH XIII is entitled ‘A Secret dialogue of Hermes Trismegistus on the mountain to his son Tat: On being born again, and on the promise to be silent’.²⁴ At the beginning of his speech, Tat demands as a suppliant (ικέτης) to receive the more advanced stages (βαθμοί) of the Hermetic *paideia* and *praxis*:²⁵

CH XIII. 1. 6-12

And you said you would deliver it to me [*scil.* the discourse on rebirth] when ‘you were about to become a stranger to the cosmos’ (ὅταν μέλλης κόσμου ἀπαλλοτριουῖσθαι). I have prepared myself, and I have steeled my purpose against the deceit of the cosmos (ἀπηνδρείωσα τὸ ἐν ἐμοὶ φρόνημα ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου ἀπάτης). Grant me what I need and give me – whether aloud (ἐκ φωνῆς) or in secret (κρυβήν) – the (discourse on) being born again that you said you would deliver. (tr. Copenhaver)

The preparation Tat had to accomplish prior to the initiation required that he become ‘a stranger to the cosmos’. As Tat affirms, he has strengthened his mind against ‘the world’s deception’ (τοῦ κόσμου ἀπάτης). Besides CH XIII, the word ἀπάτη (deceit or deception) is only used one more time in the *Hermetica*: in the section of the ascent of the soul through the planetary spheres in the *Poimandres*, in relation to the ‘deceit of longing’ (τὴν ἐπιθυμητικὴν ἀπάτην),²⁶ pertaining to the sphere of Venus. The goal of alienation from the world’s deceit reflects the

²³ Dillon (1996²) 384-392.

²⁴ ἙΡΜΟΥ ΤΡΙΣΜΕΓΙΣΤΟΥ ΠΡΟΣ ΤΟΝ ΥΙΟΝ ΤΑΤ ΕΝ ΟΡΕΙ ΛΟΓΟΣ ΑΠΟΚΡΥΦΟΣ, ΠΕΡΙ ΠΑΛΙΓΓΕΝΕΣΙΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΣΙΓΗΣ ΕΠΑΓΓΕΛΙΑΣ (tr. Copenhaver)

²⁵ CH XIII. 1. 6-12: τῆς παλιγγενεσίας λόγον μαθεῖν, ὅτι τοῦτον παρὰ πάντα μόνον ἀγνοῶ, καὶ ἔφησ, ὅταν μέλλης κόσμου ἀπαλλοτριουῖσθαι, παραδιδόναι μοι. ἔτοιμος ἐγενόμην καὶ ἀπηνδρείωσα τὸ ἐν ἐμοὶ φρόνημα ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου ἀπάτης· σὺ δέ μου καὶ τὰ ὑστερήματα ἀναπλήρωσον οἷς ἔφησ μοι παλιγγενεσίας <γένεσιν> παραδοῦναι προθέμενος ἐκ φωνῆς ἢ κρυβήν·

²⁶ CH I. 25, 5.

appreciation of the manifest universe as illusory when experienced exclusively by means of sensory perception. This was one major theme of the so-called ‘dualistic’ treatises, presumably marking an initially sharp rupture between senses and Intellect, which would be overcome in the more advanced stages.²⁷

Tat states then that he feels ready to receive the doctrine of regeneration ‘vocally’ (ἐκ φωνῆς) or ‘secretly’ (κρυβήν). This specification alludes to two forms of transmission of knowledge: verbal transmission of doctrines with emphasis on specific words which might suggest a ritual dimension, or a potentially ‘magical’ effect, and transmission of the κρυφή γνώσις by non-verbal means, especially through silence and contemplation, echoing the Platonic theory of Recollection. Furthermore, Hermes stresses that a particular state of consciousness may prepare for this kind of revelatory knowledge:²⁸ a state combining active participation in silence and the mercy of the divine will. More explicitly, in relation to the origin of the begotten, he says: ‘This sort of lineage, child, is not taught but whenever god wishes, he will recall it to memory (ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀναμυμνήσκειται)’.²⁹ A bit further on, Hermes introduces his own previous experience of regeneration in terms which recall an ‘intellectual’ body, or could potentially allude to the first, luminous vehicle of the soul.³⁰

²⁷ Pleše (2015), Shaw (2015) 151-157 and Bull (2018) 209-226 convincingly argue that the neophytes in the ‘way of Hermes’ conceived the manifest universe in a dualistic and pessimist manner during the beginning of their education and that this view was progressively abandoned in favor of a unitary and optimistic worldview in the more advanced stages of their initiation. Conversely, Fowden (1986) 99-104 and Mahé (2002) 81 had envisaged the Hermetic *paideia* in an inverse order, according to which the unitarian worldview would precede the dualistic anti-cosmism.

²⁸ For altered states of consciousness in Hermetism, see Hanegraaff 2008, and esp. 144-146 for the suggestion that Tat’s amazement in CH XIII may indicate a state of consciousness comparable to the Platonic divine ‘madness’ (*mania*).

²⁹ CH XIII. 2, 8-9, tr. Copenhagen. The verb ἀναμυμνήσκειται reinforces the Platonic tone in the treatise.

³⁰ CH XIII. 3.7-15 ἐμαυτὸν ἐξελέλυθα εἰς ἀθάνατον σῶμα, καὶ εἰμι νῦν οὐχ ὁ πρῖν, ἀλλ’ ἐγεννήθην ἐν νῶ· τὸ πρᾶγμα τοῦτο οὐ διδάσκειται, οὐδὲ τῶ πλαστῶ τούτῳ στοιχείῳ, δι’ οὗ ἔστιν ἰδεῖν· διὸ καὶ ἡμέληται μοι τὸ πρῶτον σύνθετον εἶδος· οὐκέτι κέχρωσμαι καὶ ἀφὴν ἔχω καὶ μέτρον, ἀλλότριος δὲ τούτων εἰμί. νῦν ὄρας με, ὃ τέκνον, ὀφθαλμοῖς, ὃ τι δέ <εἰμι οὗ> κατανοεῖς ἀτενίζων σῶματι καὶ ὄρασει. οὐκ ὀφθαλμοῖς τούτοις θεωροῦμαι νῦν, ὃ τέκνον.

CH XIII 3.7-15

...I went out of myself into an immortal body, and now I am not what I was before. I have been born in mind. This thing cannot be taught, nor can it be seen through any elementary fabrication that we use here below. Therefore, the initial form even of my own constitution is of no concern. Color, touch or size I no longer have; I am a stranger to them. Now you see me with your eyes, my child, but by gazing with bodily sight you do (not) understand what (I am); I am not seen with such eyes, my child. (tr. Copenhaver)

Thanks to the divine will, Hermes came out of himself into an *immortal body* and he is no longer colored and has neither touch nor measure, and can no longer be seen with the eyes of the body. In order to elucidate Tat's confusion, Hermes replies by using an apophatic string of alpha privatives,³¹ specifying that the true is 'the unsullied, the unlimited, the colorless, the figureless, the unchangeable, the uncovered, *that which shines* (τὸ φαῖνον), that which is comprehended by itself, the unalterable good, the incorporeal'.³²

The connection of the souls' vehicle(s) with the descent of the soul through the heavenly spheres is a common *topos* in Hermetism and Neoplatonism.³³ According to the doctrines of astrological mysticism

³¹ For a similar use of apophatic series of alpha privatives in other Hermetic texts, see SH I. 2 and HO I.1.

³² CH XIII. 6, 1-4 Τὸ μὴ θολούμενον, ὃ τέκνον, τὸ μὴ διοριζόμενον, τὸ ἀχρώματον, τὸ ἀσχημάτιστον, τὸ ἄτρεπτον, τὸ γυμνόν, τὸ φαῖνον, τὸ αὐτῷ καταληπτόν, τὸ ἀναλλοίωτον ἀγαθόν, τὸ ἀσώματον (tr. Copenhaver, my italics). For φαῖνον, see also the use of ἐκφαίνω, in the manner of mysteries, in CH XIII. 22. For similar use in *Ascl.* 19, see Bull (2018) 248 and n. 24.

³³ CH X. 17, 3-4 ἡ σύνθεσις τῶν ἐνδυμάτων τούτων, ὃ τέκνον, ἐν σώματι γήινῳ γίνεται. See also SH XXIV, 10 Τὸ ὀρατικόν, ὃ τέκνον, περιβέβληται χιτῶσιν. ὅταν οὗτοι οἱ χιτῶνες πυκνοὶ ᾧσι καὶ παχεῖς, <οὐκ> ὄξυωπεῖ ὁ ὀφθαλμός, ἐὰν δὲ ἀραιοὶ καὶ λεπτοί, τότε ὄξυωπέστατα βλέπουσιν. οὕτως καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς ψυχῆς. ἔχει γὰρ καὶ αὕτη ἴδια περιβόλαια ἀσώματα, καθὸ καὶ αὕτη ἀσώματός ἐστι. τὰ δὲ περιβόλαια ταῦτα ἀέρες εἰσὶν οἱ ἐν ἡμῖν. ὅταν οὗτοι ᾧσι λεπτοὶ καὶ ἀραιοὶ καὶ διαυγεῖς, τότε συνετὴ ἡ ψυχὴ ἐστίν· ὅταν δὲ τούναντίον πυκνοὶ καὶ παχεῖς καὶ τεθολωμένοι, τότε ὡς ἐν χεμίῳ ἐπὶ μακρὸν οὐ βλέπει, ἀλλὰ ταῦτα ὅσα παρὰ ποσὶ κεῖται. For Neoplatonism, see Plotinus, *Enn.* IV.3 [27], 15.1-8; II.2 [14], 2.17-22; III.6 [26], 5.25-29 Henry-Schwyzler; Porphyry, *Sent.* 29 Brisson et al.; Iamblichus, *De Anima* § 38 Finamore and Dillon; Proclus, *ET* § 196, § 205, § 207-210 Dodds; Proclus, *In Tim.* I. 5, 11- 18 Diehl; Damascius, *De princip.* § 99 (255. 3-9 Ruelle). For an overview of the vehicle's origins and functions in Neoplatonism, see Kissling 1922; Dodds 1963; Finamore 1985; Toulouse 2001; Addey 2013; Shaw 2013.

in Late Antiquity,³⁴ the seven heavenly spheres represented the first seven rungs of the celestial ladder by which the souls descend and ascend, along with their vehicles, before and after generation. The Hermetic teachings stress that the vehicles emanating from the descent through the heavenly spheres are inclined to receive the planetary energies in a distorted manner because of their intermingling with the four elements; therefore, the vehicles would have to be purified by the grace of *Noūs* before any attempt of ascent.

Nevertheless, it is of capital importance to distinguish between the first luminous and ‘intellectual’ vehicle to which Hermes seems to be referring to here, from the ‘planetary’ vehicles in which the gradual introduction of the four elements postulates immediate contact with the irrational principles pertaining to the realm of generation.³⁵ Hermes, right before introducing the twelve torments, asserts that Tat has to go beyond the concrete understanding related to the four sublunary elements (Fire, Earth, Water, Air) and suspend the perceptions of the body.³⁶ According to the Pythagoreans, divine and semi-divine souls could ‘listen to’ the music of the spheres when the bodily nature was suspended.³⁷ During the early sixth century CE, Simplicius claimed that

³⁴ For astrological mysticism in Late Antiquity, see Cumont 1909a. As for the term *mysteria* in relation to the heavenly mysteries in Hermetism, Bull (2012) 408 suggested that the term designates ‘the hidden underlying connections between earth and the movements of the heavenly bodies, which can only be experienced and grasped through contemplation (*theōria*) by souls in sympathy with this order’. For mysticism in general, see Zaehner 1957; Wainwright 1981.

³⁵ Festugière (1967) 20 was not misguided in distinguishing the original astral or pneumatic vehicle (ochēma of *Noūs*) –an intermediary between the immaterial *Noūs* and the progressively more material accretions of the universe– with which the soul is endowed prior to its descent, on the one hand, from the more compact and material vehicles, acquired during the soul’s descent through the seven planetary spheres, on the other. For the soul’s garments inclined to materiality as ἐνδύματα, see CH X.17. In SH XXIV.10 there is discussion about the ‘incorporeal envelopes’ (ἀσώματα περιβόλαια) of the soul. In the same vein, Proclus (*ET* § 205, § 207-210) admits that there is a distinction between these two ‘vehicles’: a higher one, *sumphues*, *augooides* or *astrooides*, which is immaterial, impassible and indestructible, and a lower one, *pneumatikon*, which is temporary, composed of the four elements.

³⁶ CH XIII. 6.7-7.5.

³⁷ According to Porphyry (*Vit. Pyth.* § 30 Des Places), Pythagoras could hear the Harmony of the Universe, and understood the universal music of the spheres, and of the stars which move in concert with them, and which we cannot hear because of the limitations of our weak nature. Similarly, Iamblichus (*Vit. Pyth.* XV, § 65 Deubner and Klein) reports that Pythagoras, ‘employing some ineffable and

there is a definite connection between the Sound of the Spheres and the luminous and celestial vehicle, that is to say the first vehicle, connate with the essence of the soul, and in which alone it resided in a state of bliss in the stars. According to Simplicius: ‘And if anyone had this mortal body attached to its luminous and heavenly vehicle and the senses in it purified – whether because of a good fate or a good life or, in addition to these, because of ritual perfection – he would see what is invisible to others and hear what is inaudible to others, just as is recounted of Pythagoras’.³⁸

IV. The Core of the Transformative Experience of Rebirth

Let us now examine the core of the transformative experience of rebirth. Once Tat has realized that his corporeal nature is infested with the twelve vices, Hermes advances:³⁹

CH XIII. 8.6-9.15

To us has come knowledge of god (γνώσις θεοῦ), and when it comes, my child, ignorance (ἄγνοια) has been expelled. To us has come knowledge of joy (γνώσις χαρᾶς), and when it arrives, grief (λύπη) will fly off to those who give way to it. The power that I summon (καλῶ) after joy is continence (ἐγκράτεια). O sweetest power! Let us receive her too, most gladly, child. As soon as she

abstruse divine power, extended his hearing and fixed his intellect in the heavenly harmonious sounds of the cosmos. He alone could hear and understand, so he indicated, the universal harmony and concord of the spheres, and the stars moving through them, which sound a tune fuller and more intense than any mortal ones’ (tr. Dillon/Hershbell). On the Harmony of the Spheres, see Burkert (1972) 350-368; Zhmud (2012) 337-346; Viltanioti (2015) 1-6. For an extensive bibliography on this topic, see Macris (2018) 1166.

³⁸ Simplicius, *In cael.* 2.9 (469, 7-11 Heiberg, tr. Mueller).

³⁹ CH XIII. 8.6-9-15 ἦλθεν ἡμῖν γνώσις θεοῦ· ταύτης ἐλθούσης, ὃ τέκνον, ἐξηλάθη ἡ ἄγνοια. ἦλθεν ἡμῖν γνώσις χαρᾶς· παραγενομένης ταύτης, ὃ τέκνον, ἡ λύπη φεύξεται εἰς τοὺς χωροῦντας αὐτήν. δύναμιν καλῶ ἐπὶ χαρᾶ τὴν ἐγκράτειαν· ὃ δύναμις ἡδίστη, προσλάβωμεν, ὃ τέκνον, αὐτήν ἀσμενέστατα· πῶς ἅμα τῷ παραγενέσθαι ἀπόσατο τὴν ἀκρασίαν; τετάρτην δὲ νῦν καλῶ καρτερίαν, τὴν κατὰ τῆς ἐπιθυμίας δύναμιν. ὁ βαθμὸς οὗτος, ὃ τέκνον, δικαιοσύνης ἐστὶν ἕδρασμα· χωρὶς γὰρ κρίσεως ἴδε πῶς τὴν ἀδικίαν ἐξήλασεν· ἐδικαιώθημεν, ὃ τέκνον, ἀδικίας ἀπούσης. ἔκτην δύναμιν καλῶ εἰς ἡμᾶς, τὴν κατὰ τῆς πλεονεξίας, κοινωνίαν. ἀποστάσης δὲ ἔτι καλῶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν καὶ φεύγει ἀπάτη, ἀλήθεια παραγίνεται ἴδε πῶς τὸ ἀγαθὸν πεπλήρωται, ὃ τέκνον, παραγινομένης τῆς ἀληθείας· φθόνος γὰρ ἀφ’ ἡμῶν ἀπέστη· τῇ δὲ ἀληθείᾳ καὶ τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἐπεγένετο, ἅμα ζωῆ καὶ φωτί, καὶ οὐκέτι ἐπῆλθεν οὐδεμία τοῦ σκοτόυς τιμωρία, ἀλλ’ ἐξέπτησαν νικηθεῖσαι ροίζω.

arrives, how she has repulsed incontinence (ἀκρασία)! Now in fourth place I summon (καλῶ) perseverance (καρτερία), the power opposed to lust (ἐπιθυμία). This next level, my child, is the seat of justice (δικαιοσύνη). See how she has expelled injustice (ἀδικία), without a judgment. With injustice gone, my child, we have been made just. The sixth power that I summon (καλῶ) to us is the one opposed to greed (πλεονεξία), liberality (κοινωνία). And when greed has departed, I summon (καλῶ) another, truth (ἀλήθεια), who puts deceit (ἀπάτη) to flight. And truth arrives. See how the good (τὸ ἀγαθόν) has been fulfilled, my child, when truth arrives. For envy (φθόνος) has withdrawn from us, but the good, together with life and light (ζωὴ καὶ φῶς) has followed after truth, and no torment any longer attacks from the darkness. Vanquished, they have flown away in a flapping of wings (ροίζω). (tr. Copenhagen)

A recapitulation of the twelve torments and the ten powers in CH XIII:

THE TWELVE TORMENTS/VICES	THE TEN POWERS
1) Ἄγνοια (ignorance)	1) Γνώσις θεοῦ (knowledge of god)
2) Λύπη (grief)	2) Γνώσις χαρᾶς (knowledge of joy)
3) Ἀκρασία (incontinence)	3) Ἐγκράτεια (self-control)
4) Ἐπιθυμία (lust)	4) Καρτερία (steadfastness)
5) Ἀδικία (injustice)	5) Δικαιοσύνη (righteousness)
6) Πλεονεξία (greed)	6) Κοινωνία (generosity)
7) Ἀπάτη (deceit)	7) Ἀλήθεια (truth)
8) Φθόνος (envy, malice)	8) Τὸ ἀγαθόν (the good)
9) Δόλος (treachery)	9) Ζωὴ (life)
10) Ὁργή (anger)	10) Φῶς (light)
11) Προπέτεια (rashness)	
12) Κακία (wickedness)	

When comparing the two lists, after the seventh pair of powers and torments, there are no more direct opposites. The three remaining δυνάμεις (τὸ ἀγαθόν, ζωὴ, φῶς) are inextricably linked to supracelestial realities. Τὸ ἀγαθόν (good) and φθόνος (envy), the eighth pair in the list, may allude to the Platonic Demiurge. In the *Timaeus*, Plato claims the Demiurge ‘was good (ἀγαθὸς ἦν), and in the good (ἀγαθῶ) no envy

(φθόνος) ever arises in relation to anything'.⁴⁰ Similarly, ζωή and φῶς are highlighted in the *Poimandres* as the essence of the supreme divine *Noūs*,⁴¹ corresponding to the Ninth and presumably the Tenth Sphere.⁴² It is crucial to examine the relevant intertextual references from the *Poimandres*, especially since CH XIII is the only Hermetic treatise, besides the *Poimandres*, in which the name of 'Poimandres' is explicitly stated.⁴³ According to the cosmogony of the *Poimandres*, the First *Noūs*, by the act of speaking, creates a second *Noūs*,⁴⁴ that of the Demiurge (presumably of the Eighth Sphere). There are several passages which clearly link the First Paternal *Noūs* with ζωή and φῶς. First of all:⁴⁵

CH I. 9. 1-5

The mind who is god (ὁ δὲ Νοῦς ὁ θεός), being androgyne and existing as life and light (ζωή καὶ φῶς ὑπάρχων), by speaking gave birth to a second mind, a craftsman (ἕτερον Νοῦν δημιουργόν), who, as god of fire (πῦρ) and spirit (πνεῦμα), crafted seven governors (διοικητάς); they encompass the sensible world in circles, and their government is called fate (εἰμαρμένη). (tr. Copenhagen)

⁴⁰ *Ti.* 29 E 1-2: ἀγαθὸς ἦν, ἀγαθῷ δὲ οὐδεις περὶ οὐδενὸς οὐδέποτε ἐγγίγνεται φθόνος· (pers. tr.). Translation Bury (Loeb): 'He was good, and in him that is good no envy ariseth ever concerning anything'. The Nock-Festugière edition, despite its methodological flaw in assuming an *exclusive* origin of Hermetism from the Greek philosophical milieu, excluding the Egyptian influence as a mere decorative factor, has nevertheless put forward the Platonizing tendencies of the Hermetic authors.

⁴¹ CH I. 9, 12, 17 & 21.

⁴² The exact characteristics of the Eighth, Ninth and Tenth spheres vary according to different Hermetic texts. For a comprehensive discussion on mental faculties and cosmic levels associated with these spheres, see Mahé 2002.

⁴³ 'Poimandres' is mentioned twice in the section preceding the final hymn of praise (CH XIII. 15, 3 & 5) as ὁ τῆς αὐθεντίας νοῦς. Nock-Festugière II (1946) 216, n. 66, establish parallels between Poimandres and the luminous god in *PGM* IV 693-704. For the etymology and possible meanings of the name 'Poimandres', see Kingsley 1993; Jackson 1999; Van den Kerchove 2014.

⁴⁴ Similar view about a second Intellect in Numenius Fr. 17 Des Places and *OC* 7 Des Places (Kroll, p. 14); see also Scott II 31-32.

⁴⁵ CH I. 9.1-5: ὁ δὲ Νοῦς ὁ θεός, ἀρρενόθηλος ὢν, ζωή καὶ φῶς ὑπάρχων, ἀπεκύησε λόγῳ ἕτερον Νοῦν δημιουργόν, ὃς θεὸς τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ πνεύματος ὢν, ἐδημιούργησε διοικητάς τινας ἑπτὰ, ἐν κύκλοις περιέχοντας τὸν αἰσθητὸν κόσμον, καὶ ἡ διοίκησις αὐτῶν εἰμαρμένη καλεῖται.

In this text, the Hermetic Demiurge crafts the seven planetary governors and their spheres as orchestrators of human destiny. The transition from the sublime essence of the *divine Noūs* made of life and light into the composition of the second *demiurgic Noūs* from fire and spirit indicates a substantial ontological descent.

The same reference to the divine *Noūs* as ζωή καὶ φῶς occurs in CH I.12: ‘Mind, the father of all, who is life and light (ὄν ζωὴ καὶ φῶς), gave birth to a man like himself whom he loved as his own child’.⁴⁶ In this context, the Primordial human being is given life directly from the supreme divine *Noūs* and not from the second *demiurgic Noūs* which turns out to be his own brother.⁴⁷ Poimandres makes clear that the goal of rebirth in human beings consists in realizing that their own essence is made of life and light like their god and Father:⁴⁸

CH I. 21. 5-7

Light and life (φῶς καὶ ζωὴ) are god and father, from whom the man came to be. So, if you learn that you are from life and light and that you happen to come from them, you shall advance to life once again (εἰς ζωὴν πάλιν χωρήσεις). (tr. Copenhagen slightly modified)

Hence, the human being, having realized that they are made of ζωὴ and φῶς, may ‘advance to life once again’ as an entirely reborn entity.

When the Primordial human being entered the craftsman’s demiurgic sphere, the planetary governors loved him and each gave him a share of his own order (ἕκαστος δὲ μετεδίδου τῆς ἰδίας τάξεως), so that he may learn their *essence* (καταμαθὼν τὴν τούτων οὐσίαν) and share in their *nature* (μεταλαβὼν τῆς αὐτῶν φύσεως).⁴⁹ However, once the Primordial

⁴⁶ CH I. 12, 1-2, tr. Copenhagen.

⁴⁷ Similar doctrine regarding the creation of the immortal part of the human soul directly by the Demiurge and not by the younger gods in Plato, *Ti.* 41c6-d1.

⁴⁸ CH I. 21, 5-7 φῶς καὶ ζωὴ ἐστὶν ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατήρ, ἐξ οὗ ἐγένετο ὁ ἄνθρωπος. εἰς ζωὴν πάλιν χωρήσεις. ἐὰν οὖν μάθῃς αὐτὸν ἐκ ζωῆς καὶ φωτὸς ὄντα καὶ ὅτι ἐκ τούτων τυγχάνεις, εἰς ζωὴν πάλιν χωρήσεις.

⁴⁹ CH I. 13: γενόμενος ἐν τῇ δημιουργικῇ σφαίρᾳ, ἔξων τὴν πᾶσαν ἐξουσίαν, κατενόησε τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ τὰ δημιουργήματα, οἱ δὲ ἠράσθησαν αὐτοῦ, ἕκαστος δὲ μετεδίδου τῆς ἰδίας τάξεως· καὶ καταμαθὼν τὴν τούτων οὐσίαν καὶ μεταλαβὼν τῆς αὐτῶν φύσεως ἠβουλήθη ἀναρρῆξαι τὴν περιφέρειαν τῶν κύκλων, καὶ τὸ κράτος τοῦ ἐπικειμένου ἐπὶ τοῦ πυρὸς κατανοῆσαι (my italics). The two Aorist participles (καταμαθὼν, μεταλαβὼν) suggest that a state of communion has occurred between the Primordial human being and the heavenly gods.

Man had made love with Nature, he acquired the nature of the cosmic framework and seven celestial human beings were fashioned in accordance with the seven planets:⁵⁰

CH I. 16. 2-9

Poimandres said: ‘This is the mystery (μυστήριον) that has been kept hidden (κεκρυμμένον) until this very day. When nature made love with the man, she bore a wonder most wondrous. In him he had the nature of the cosmic framework of the seven, who are made of fire and spirit, as I told you, and without delay nature at once gave birth to seven men, androgyne and exalted (μεταρσίους), whose *natures* (φύσεις) were like those of the seven governors.’ (tr. Copenhaver)

The distinction between the fateful *nature* of the planets and their pure *essence* should be emphasized. When the original human being entered into the demiurgic sphere, he first shared both the *essence* and *nature* of the heavenly gods. However, in the course of his ontological descent, once converted into the seven planetary androgynes born by Nature, he participated *exclusively* in the *nature* of the seven governors.⁵¹ From that point onwards, ‘from life and light the man became soul and mind’;⁵² that is to say, the division into the seven planetary androgynes entails the entrance into the cosmic spheres in which light becomes intellect and life, soul. The seven androgynes have interiorized only the *nature* of the planets, but remain reminiscent of their origin by standing high in the sky (μετάρσιοι). When the androgynes were finally sundered into male and female, and began to multiply, the mortal human being came to be.⁵³

Conversely, in the core of the transformative experience of CH XIII the soul may be restored as life, and intellect might be reinstated as light.

⁵⁰ ὁ δὲ Ποιμάνδρης εἶπε, Τοῦτό ἐστι τὸ κεκρυμμένον μυστήριον μέχρι τῆσδε τῆς ἡμέρας. ἢ γὰρ φύσις ἐπιμιγεῖσα τῷ Ἀνθρώπῳ ἤνεγκέ τι θαῦμα θαυμασιώτατον· ἔχοντος γὰρ αὐτοῦ τῆς ἀρμονίας τῶν ἐπτὰ τὴν φύσιν, οὗς ἔφην σοι ἐκ πυρὸς καὶ πνεύματος, οὐκ ἀνέμενεν ἢ φύσις, ἀλλ’ εὐθὺς ἀπεκύησεν ἐπὶ ἀνθρώπους, πρὸς τὰς φύσεις τῶν ἐπτὰ διοικητόρων, ἀρρενοθήλεας καὶ μεταρσίους (*my italics*).

⁵¹ Or possibly participated in the *nature* of only one of the seven governors, that is to say that each androgyne would correspond to a specific planetary god. Both options are plausible.

⁵² CH I. 17, tr. Copenhaver.

⁵³ CH I. 18.

This denotes that rebirth entails the passage of the mortal being, first into the status of the seven androgynes who shared the *nature* of the planets; then, into the original human being who had entered the demiurge's sphere and participated in their *essence* as well; and finally, into the Primordial human made of life and light. Consequently, it is only natural that the process of rebirth in CH XIII reproduces the consecutive layers of the cosmic descent of the *Poimandres* in reverse order:⁵⁴ after the purification of the planetary energies from the sensory perceptions attached to their reception (ἡ τοῦ κόσμου ἀπάτη), the ascension through the seven heavenly spheres might be attempted. Once the passage through the seven spheres was completed, divinization could be further pursued in the Eighth Sphere, possibly that of the second *Demiurgic Noūs*, the begetter of the planetary gods. Finally, divinization may be accomplished through the return into the state of 'life and light' of the Primordial human being (possibly in the Ninth Sphere), reminder of the Father-First *Noūs*, dwelling presumably above the Ninth Sphere. Thus, the key point in achieving this sort of alchemical transmutation into ζωὴ and φῶς requires as a preliminary preparation the ability to convert the fateful *nature* of the seven heavenly gods into their genuine *essence*.

Another argument pointing toward the planetary correspondences of the first seven pairs of powers/vices is that once the torments have been vanquished, they fly away making a whistling sound (ἐξέπτησαν νικηθεῖσαι ῥοίζῳ). The term ῥοίζος has Chaldean and Pythagorean connotations and describes the sound emitted by the planetary revolutions.⁵⁵ The dative ῥοίζῳ is most likely a *dativus modi*, describing the manner or way in which something happened, and could eventually be interpreted from a double perspective; on the one hand it might refer to ἐξέπτησαν and signify that while the torments fly away, they produce the whistling sound; on the other hand, it might refer to νικηθεῖσαι: that

⁵⁴ Festugière (1967) 21-22 eloquently remarks that the soul's ascent is symmetrical to its descent but in reverse order. Van den Kerchove (2012) 348-349 also suggests that rebirth has the sense of return to a previous state ('retour à un état antérieur');

⁵⁵ For a similar use of the term ῥοίζος with cosmological connotations, see CH I. 11, 2: ὁ δὲ δημιουργὸς Νοῦς σὺν τῷ Λόγῳ, ὁ περίσχων τοὺς κύκλους καὶ διῶν ῥοίζῳ, ἔστρεψε τὰ ἑαυτοῦ δημιουργήματα καὶ εἶασε στρέφεσθαι ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἀορίστου εἰς ἀπέραντον τέλος. For the term ῥοίζος, see *Oracles Chaldaïques* Fr. 37, Fr. 107, Fr. 146 Des Places; Lewy (2011³) 18-20, n. 46; 193, n. 63; Shaw (2014²) 101-102, 198; Iles Johnston (1990) 104, 108, 122; Addey (2014) 263-264.

it is by means of the rushing motion of the planetary revolutions, reminder of the cosmic harmony, that the torments are defeated.⁵⁶ The text may be deliberately polysemic at this point.

What is more, during the speech-act of summoning the ten divine powers, Hermes uses four times the verb ‘καλωῶ’ which, along with ἐπικαλοῦμαι,⁵⁷ is constantly used in similar summonings in the *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (PGM), with the difference that in the magical papyri the entities invoked are divine agencies rather than virtues. This similarity reinforces the idea that the virtues are powers connected to divine agencies and that Hermes interacts with cosmic divinities.

V. The Seven Heavenly Spheres

Let us now examine the first seven pairs of powers and torments:

THE SEVEN POWERS/VIRTUES	THE SEVEN TORMENTS/VICES
1) Γνωσῖς θεοῦ (knowledge of god)	Ἄγνοια (ignorance)
2) Γνωσῖς χαρᾶς (knowledge of joy)	Λύπη (grief)
3) Ἐγκράτεια (self-control)	Ἄκρασία (incontinence)
4) Καρτερία (steadfastness)	Ἐπιθυμία (lust)
5) Δικαιοσύνη (righteousness)	Ἄδικία (injustice)
6) Κοινωνία (generosity)	Πλεονεξία (greed)
7) Ἀλήθεια (truth)	Ἀπάτη (deceit)

1) The **knowledge of god** (γνωσῖς θεοῦ) is very frequently compared to **sunlight**, not only in Hermetism, but also throughout the Platonic tradition. In CH XIII, in the section of the secret hymn at the end of the treatise, Hermes says: ‘*Holy knowledge* (γνωσῖς ἁγία), you *enlightened* me (φωτισθεῖς ἀπὸ σοῦ); through you, hymning the intellectual *light* (τὸ νοητὸν φῶς)’.⁵⁸ In CH XVI, the Sun is explicitly identified with the Demiurge,⁵⁹ while a single ray of sunshine in one’s intellect may chase away all the evil effects of *daimones*.⁶⁰ The Sun had the most prominent

⁵⁶ I am grateful to Irini-Fotini Viltanioti for the suggestion that ροίζω may also refer to νικηθεῖσαι.

⁵⁷ See also Bull (2018) 279-80 and n.156 and 159, who counts 115 instances of the verb-form ἐπικαλοῦμαι in the PGM.

⁵⁸ CH XIII. 18. 3-4 tr. Copenhaver, my italics.

⁵⁹ CH XVI. 18.

⁶⁰ CH XVI. 16.

cult in the Egyptian and Middle Eastern religious traditions,⁶¹ while for Platonists it resonated with the intelligible light of the Good in the myth of the cave.⁶² The astrologer Vettius Valens qualifies the sun as ‘noeric light’ (φῶς νοερόν), and associates it with intellect (νοῦς) and the ordinance of the gods (θεῶν χρηματισμόν).⁶³ Finally, in CH XII, ‘the Mind has not been cut off from god’s essentiality; it has expanded, as it were, *like the light of the sun*. In humans this mind is god’.⁶⁴ ‘**Ignorance**’ (ἄγνοια) would consequently pertain to the absence of light, that is to say to spiritual darkness.

2) According to the astrological doctrines of the Hellenistic period, the **Moon** reflected the sun’s light and was therefore associated with the replication of the noeric light within the Psyche. Plutarch in *De facie* ascribes this idea of the moon reflecting the light of the sun to Empedocles.⁶⁵ Valens thinks that the moon, ‘lit by the reflection of the sun’s light and possessing a borrowed light, indicates human life and body’,⁶⁶ among other things. In the *Korē Kosmou*, as discussed earlier, the moon follows the sun and ‘promised to light up her course in Sun’s wake. She added that she had already engendered Fear, Silence, Sleep, and Memory that would be useful to human beings’.⁶⁷ **Knowledge of joy** (γνώσις χαρᾶς), immediately resulting from the acknowledgment of the divine, represents the immediate reflection of the illuminated *Noūs* into the enlightened Soul. According to Plutarch, the moon is a repository for souls and is ruled by Persephone. Humans are composed of three parts: body, furnished by the earth; soul, provided by the moon;

⁶¹ Cf. Cumont 1909b.

⁶² Plato, *R.* 514a-520a.

⁶³ Valens, *Anthol. Lib. Nov.* I, 1, 4-6 Pingree.

⁶⁴ CH XII. 1, 3-7 ὁ νοῦς οὖν οὐκ ἔστιν ἀποτετμημένος τῆς οὐσιότητος τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ ἠπλωμένος καθάπερ τὸ τοῦ ἡλίου φῶς. οὗτος δὲ ὁ νοῦς ἐν μὲν ἀνθρώποις θεός ἐστι· (tr. Copenhaver slightly modified, my italics).

⁶⁵ Plutarch, *De facie*, 929e Cherniss. See also Greenbaum (2016) 26, n. 35. Pseudo-Plutarch (*De placitis philosophorum*, II, 28 Goodwin) attributes the theory of the moon reflecting the sun’s light to Thales and his School. In Plato, *R.* 616e–617a, the moon’s circle gains its color by reflecting the sun’s light, while in the *Cra.* 409 a-b Anaxagoras is credited with the restoration of the more ancient belief that the moon received its light from the sun.

⁶⁶ Valens, *Anthol. Lib. Nov.* I 1, 14-16, tr. Riley.

⁶⁷ SH XXIII. 28, 3-6, tr. Litwa.

and mind (*noūs*) supplied by the sun, just as it gives light to the moon.⁶⁸ It is understandable then that knowledge of joy could apply to the moon. Hence, ‘**grief**’ (λύπη) would correspond to the lack of reception of the divine light. That the two primary heavenly powers might be connected with the two luminaries is standard in the Platonic order of the planets, although in an inverse order, where the moon precedes the sun.

3) The third couple **ἀκρασία vs. ἐγκράτεια** (incontinence vs. self-control) possibly pertains to the **star of Ares**, the god of violent drives who had the tendency to be experienced by humans as excessive fire beyond moderation. In SH XXIX, Mars is qualified as ‘violent’ (θρασύς) and is supposed to bring ‘anger’ (θυμός) and ‘rage’ (χόλον) into human lives. In the section explaining the intermingling of material elements with immaterial emanations, Iamblichus suggests that the emanation deriving from Mars simply tends to provoke motion.⁶⁹ However, the humans who had not been trained in enhancing their level of receptivity (ἐπιτηδειότης) through purificatory, ethical and ritual preparation tended to receive the influx of the planet as ‘inflammation exceeding moderation’.⁷⁰ For Iamblichus, ‘the feebleness of the material and earthly realm is not fully able to take in the unsullied power and pure life-force of aetherial elements, [and] it transfers its own vulnerability to the primary causes’.⁷¹ Therefore, the challenging task concerning Martian energy would have to be its containment, resulting in the power of self-control (ἐγκράτεια).⁷²

4) **Ἐπιθυμία** (desire, lust) and its derivatives clearly relate to the star of **Aphrodite**. In SH XXIX, Venus brings ‘desire’ (ὄρεξις), in the *Korē Kosmou* ‘desire, pleasure and laughter’ (πόθο, ἡδονὴν καὶ γέλωτα),⁷³

⁶⁸ Plutarch, *De facie*, 943a. See also Greenbaum (2016) 26-27, n. 40. Cumont (1909b) 464 n. 3, suggests that Plutarch derived the eschatological ideas in *De facie* from Posidonius.

⁶⁹ Iamblichus, *DM (Reply to Porphyry)* 1.18 (55.6 Parthey=41.26 Saffrey/Segonds/Lecerf). For the suggestion of essential correspondences between Hermetism and theurgy, especially Iamblichus, see Fowden (1986) 131-153; Shaw 2015; Hanegraaff (2022) 99-106.

⁷⁰ Iamblichus, *DM* 1.18 (55.6-10 Parthey=41.26-42.3 Saffrey/Segonds/Lecerf).

⁷¹ Iamblichus, *DM* 1.18 (55.10-56.2 Parthey=42.3-9 Saffrey/Segonds/Lecerf, tr. Clarke/Dillon/Hershbell).

⁷² This also echoes the ‘exaltation’ of Mars in Capricorn in psychological terms. In the nocturnal domicile of Saturn, the emanations from Mars (nocturnal planet) can be contained and expressed in a more focused manner.

⁷³ SH XXIII. 28.

while in the cosmic ascent of the *Poimandres*, the sphere of Venus becomes the place where the soul leaves behind the ‘illusion of desire’ (τὴν ἐπιθυμητικὴν ἀπάτην).⁷⁴ Valens also thinks that ‘Venus is desire (ἐπιθυμία) and love (ἔρωσ)’.⁷⁵ Consequently, **καρτερία** would be the appropriate virtue of the soul possibly in order to establish the transition from the Πάνδημος to the Οὐράνια Aphrodite.⁷⁶

5) The fifth pair of opposites **δικαιοσύνη-ἀδικία** (righteousness or justice vs. injustice) probably conveys the sphere of **Cronus**. In the *Korē Kosmou*, ‘Saturn announced that he was already the father of Justice (Δίκη) and Necessity (Ἀνάγκη)’.⁷⁷ Valens qualifies Saturn as the ‘star of Nemesis’ (ἔστι δὲ Νεμέσεως ἀστήρ), standing for Justice and retribution in the cosmos.⁷⁸ Paulus and Olympiodorus also refer to the Lot of Nemesis as Saturn’s lot.⁷⁹ Furthermore, according to the astrological doctrine of ‘exaltations’ or ὑψώματα, which postulated that each planet expresses its more intense effect in a particular zodiacal sign –and in a particular degree–, the zodiacal sign in which Saturn is attributed is Libra, the sign which mirrors the quest for balance and justice.⁸⁰ Finally, in Plato’s myth of Cronus in *Laws* III, the Athenian demonstrates that law and justice should be rational. The Athenian explains that although Cronus’ reign is over and divine beings no longer guide us, within human beings there is a divine element, namely, reason. By following reason, justice and the laws will mirror the divine rule that occurred during the time of Cronus and humans will be happy.⁸¹ The reign of Cronus as the expression of a ‘golden era’ for mankind derives

⁷⁴ CH I.25.

⁷⁵ Valens, *Anthol. Lib. Nov.* I 1.3, 16.

⁷⁶ For the Οὐράνια and the Πάνδημος Aphrodite, see Plato, *Smp.* 180 d-e; Plotinus, *Enn.* III.5 (50) 2; Proclus, *In Crat.* 183, 110.5-111.20 Pasquali.

⁷⁷ SH XXIII. 28, πατὴρ γεγονέναι καὶ Δίκης καὶ Ἀνάγκης.

⁷⁸ Valens, *Anthol. Lib. Nov.* I 1.2, 19.

⁷⁹ Paulus Alexandrinus *Isag.*, ch. 23, 49.14-15 Boer; Olympiodorus *Comm. in Paulum*, ch. 22, 56.21-22 Boer. I am grateful to Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum for this remark.

⁸⁰ For the doctrine of exaltations in Hellenistic astrology, see Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* I. 19 Robbins. See also Bouché-Leclercq (1899) 192-199; Tester (1989) 67, 78. Rochberg (1998) 48-49 endorses the Mesopotamian origins of this doctrine; see also Champion (2008) 83.

⁸¹ Plato, *Lg.* 713c-714a.

from a tradition which goes back to Hesiod and was further developed in terms of ‘intellectual purity’ in the *Cratylus* 396 b-c.⁸²

6) ‘**Generosity**’ and ‘the tendency to share within society’ (**κοινωνία**) fairly echoes **Zeus**’ gifts in the *Korē Kosmou*, where he fathers ‘Fortune, Hope and Peace’ (Τύχην καὶ Ἐλπίδα καὶ Εἰρήνην) for the benefit of humans.⁸³ In the Sixth Sphere of Jupiter in the cosmic ascent of the *Poimandres*, the soul abandons ‘the evil impulses that come from wealth’ (τὰς ἀφορμὰς τὰς κακὰς τοῦ πλούτου), echoing **greed** (**πλεονεξία**), the sixth torment.⁸⁴ Valens associates the star of Zeus with a generous social dimension and with the realm of earthly possessions. He therefore connects Jupiter with, on the one hand, ‘political ties, acquaintance, friendships with great men, prosperities, salaries, great gifts, abundance’, and, on the other, with ‘deposits in trust, money and stewardships’.⁸⁵ Ptolemy stresses that Jupiter in a negative position gives ‘prodigality’ (ἀσωτία) instead of ‘magnanimity’ (μεγαλονοχία).⁸⁶ The associations of the deity Zeus Ktēsios with property and acquisition are also relevant to our point.⁸⁷ As a god of the house and its protection, Zeus Ktēsios was propitiated to increase the contents of the storeroom as well as the health and good prosperity of the family.

7) The seventh pair of attributes (**ἀλήθεια-ἀπάτη**, truth vs. deceit) obviously refers to **Hermes**, who is undoubtedly the god presiding over the whole Hermetic corpus, and is highlighted as the fictional writer of each treatise. Hermes Trismegistus is often connected with the star of Hermes, even though he is not constantly identical with it. The *Disc.8-9* (NHC VI.6) provides evidence for direct identification of the mystagogue with the star of Hermes. Once the mystagogical vision of entering the two supracosmic realms (first of the Eighth, then the Ninth sphere) has been completed, Hermes gives instructions for writing and preserving the account of the experience.⁸⁸ The instructions involve a

⁸² On the reign of Cronus in Hesiod, Plato and Neoplatonism, see Hoffmann (2017), especially 742-768. For the Orphic dimension of Cronus, see Brisson 2002.

⁸³ SH XXIII. 28.

⁸⁴ CH I.25.

⁸⁵ Valens, *Anthol. Lib. Nov.* I 1.2, 21-26, tr. Riley.

⁸⁶ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* III. 13.

⁸⁷ For a comprehensive discussion on Zeus Ktēsios in an astrological context and especially in relation to the eleventh house and the *Agathos Daimon*, see Greenbaum (2016) 51-52.

⁸⁸ *Disc.8-9*, NHC VI. 6, 60.10-63.32.

detailed procedure which has to take place at a specific moment. As the mystagogue postulates: ‘My son, you will do this when I am in Virgo, and the sun is in the first half of the day, and fifteen degrees have passed by me’.⁸⁹ Thus, the spiritual guide is explicitly identified with the star of Hermes, and the appropriate moment for the execution of the ritual establishes the beginning of a *katarchic* horoscope:⁹⁰ Mercury should be in Virgo, sign of its domicile (οἶκος) and exaltation (ὑψωμα), and more precisely the planet should have reached the fifteenth degree of Virgo, this particular degree standing for the absolute exaltation of the planet, according to Hellenistic astrologers.⁹¹ Similarly, in the *Korē Kosmou*, Hermes is explicitly identified with the planet Mercury, since he states that he will benefit the lives of humans born under its zodiacal signs, which he later characterizes as ‘wise and intelligent’.⁹² According to the astrological doctrine of planetary domiciles, these two signs are Gemini and Virgo.⁹³ The ‘all-knowing’ Hermes is also identified with the corresponding heavenly god in other passages of the *Korē Kosmou*.⁹⁴

Furthermore, Hermes in all its expressions (god, ancient sage, planet, psychopomp) represents in the *Hermetica* the link to supramundane realities through the teaching of the cosmic ascent in a mystagogical manner. Hence, Hermes’ position as the last heavenly sphere is hardly surprising in this context. Ἀλήθεια is stated as one of the planetary gifts Hermes conveys to humans in the *Korē Kosmou*, along with ‘Wisdom, Moderation and Persuasion’.⁹⁵ Moreover, the whole process of ἐρμηνεύειν, of interpreting or deciphering truth from deceit is traditionally represented as a Mercurial task.⁹⁶ Hermes is well-known

⁸⁹ *Disc. 8-9*, NHC VI. 6, 62. 16-20, tr. Brashler/Dirkse/Parrott in Robinson (1978).

⁹⁰ *Katarchic* is the branch of astrology which seeks to determine the most auspicious moment, the appropriate *kairos* in order to initiate a specific activity.

⁹¹ For the exact degree of planetary exaltations, see Dorotheus of Sidon, *Carmen Astrologicum* I. 2 Pingree; Firmicus Maternus, *Matheseos Libri VIII*, II, 4.5 Kroll/Skutsch/Ziegler.

⁹² SH XXIII. 29.

⁹³ For the astrological doctrine of planetary domiciles, cf. Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* I. 17; Valens *Anthol. Lib. Nov.* I.2. See also Bouché-Leclercq (1899) 182-192.

⁹⁴ SH XXIII. 6-8.

⁹⁵ SH XXIII. 29.

⁹⁶ Similar view in Plato, *Cra.* 407e-408c.

to stand for both truth and deceit,⁹⁷ and astrologically it represents not only the priesthood of the Egyptian temples and all writers, interpreters of heaven and wise people, but also thieves and tricksters.⁹⁸

VI. The Order of the Planets

In our hypothetical reconstruction, the order of the planets does not follow the Chaldean or Platonic order, or the sequence of the days of the week. The three above-mentioned sequences constituted the most common tropes of planetary order in Late Antiquity.⁹⁹ The planetary order in CH XIII appears to be a unique planetary sequence: **Sun-Moon-Mars-Venus-Saturn-Jupiter-Mercury**. However, this should hardly come as a surprise since each Hermetic treatise follows a unique planetary order (with the exception of the *Poimandres* which follows the Chaldean order).¹⁰⁰ The major inference to be taken from this is that this specific sequence brings together three pairs of planetary dipoles, plus Mercury.

1) The Sun and Moon are the dipole of the luminaries which offer illumination, representing the archetypal Father and Mother, or Intellect and its reflection in Soul.

2) Mars and Venus stand for boldness and attractiveness and may represent the spirited (τὸ θυμοειδές) and appetitive (τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν)

⁹⁷ Plato in *Cra.* 408c associates Hermes with *logos*, the discourse which is of a double nature and may therefore be either true or false. *Logos* is associated with Mercury in SH XXIX.

⁹⁸ Valens, *Anthol. Lib. Nov.* I 1.4, 39 writes that Hermes also stands for ‘those making their livelihood with displays of skill, deception, gambling, or sleight of hand’ (ἀπὸ ἐπιδείξεως τὸν βίον ποριζομένους, ἔτι δὲ πλάνης καὶ ἀληθείας καὶ ἀκαταστασίας, tr. Riley).

⁹⁹ For a comprehensive discussion on planetary orders, and zodiacal signs connected with planets, see Greenbaum (2016) 165-174. See also Culianu (1981) 96-110; Culianu (1982) 295; Culianu (1983) 48-54, esp. 51.

¹⁰⁰ The sequences of the order of the planets in different Hermetic treatises:

- 1) CH I. 25 Moon-Mercury-Venus-Sun-Mars-Jupiter-Saturn (Chaldean order)
- 2) SH XXIII. 28-29 Sun-Moon-Saturn-Jupiter-Mars-Venus-Mercury
- 3a) SH XXIX Moon-Saturn-Sun-Venus-Mars-Mercury-Jupiter
- 3b) SH XXIX Moon-Jupiter-Mars-Venus-Saturn-Sun-Mercury
- 3c) SH XXIX Saturn-Jupiter-Mercury-Mars-Moon-Venus-Sun
- 4) CH XIII Sun-Moon-Mars-Venus-Saturn-Jupiter-Mercury

parts of the irrational soul,¹⁰¹ as well as the archetypal lovers in Greek religion, mythology and astrological tradition. From an astrological standpoint, they both belong in the nocturnal sect of planets.¹⁰²

3) Saturn and Jupiter belong in the diurnal sect of planets and share a common social background, with Jupiter being expansive in his planetary gifts to such an extent that abundance may be turned into corruption and greediness, while Saturn stands for a restrictive form of impersonal justice. In the fifth century, Proclus associates them both with the rational part of the soul.¹⁰³

4) Finally, Mercury was well-known in the astrological tradition as being extremely fluid in interpretation, and potentially of either the diurnal or the nocturnal sect of planets, and likewise the masculine or feminine.¹⁰⁴ It is as if it formed a dipole in itself, which operates as a sort of key, since it would either reveal the *truth* about the cosmic embodiment, propelling the soul toward the supracosmic spheres, or toward the *deceit* of materiality.

The planetary sequence in CH XIII remarkably resembles the one in the *Korē Kosmou*.¹⁰⁵ The sequence of the *Korē Kosmou* (Sun-Moon-Saturn-Jupiter-Mars-Venus-Mercury) is almost identical to that of CH XIII (Sun-Moon-Mars-Venus-Saturn-Jupiter-Mercury) with one difference: in the *Korē Kosmou* the dipole Saturn-Jupiter precedes the dipole Mars-Venus. This may be due to the fact that in the *Korē Kosmou* the soul has not yet entered the realm of generation and the dipole representing the ‘rational’ part of the soul (Saturn-Jupiter) might precede the dipole standing for the ‘irrational’ part (Mars-Venus).

¹⁰¹ For the Platonic theory of the tripartite division of the soul, see *R.* IV 439a-443e; *Phdr.* 253c-254e; *Ti.* 70a-73d.

¹⁰² For the doctrine of diurnal and nocturnal planets, see Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* I.7; Valens, *Anthol., Lib. Nov.* I.1.

¹⁰³ Proclus, *In Tim.* III 355.7-19 Diehl: δεῖ δὲ ὡς τὸν ὅλον κόσμον, οὕτω καὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐπισκέπασθαι τελείως, διότι καὶ μικρὸς ἐστὶ καὶ οὗτος κόσμος· ἔχει γὰρ καὶ νοῦν καὶ λόγον καὶ θεῖον σῶμα καὶ θνητόν, ὥσπερ τὸ πᾶν, καὶ διήρηται ἀνὰ λόγον τῷ παντί. ὅθεν δὴ καὶ λέγειν τινὲς εἰώθασιν, ὡς τὸ μὲν νοερὸν αὐτοῦ τῇ ἀπλανεῖ τέτακται ἀνάλογον, τοῦ δὲ λόγου τὸ μὲν θεωρητικὸν τῷ Κρόνῳ, τὸ δὲ πολιτικὸν Δί, τοῦ δὲ ἀλόγου τὸ μὲν θυμοειδὲς Ἄρεϊ, τὸ δὲ φωνητικὸν Ἑρμῇ, τὸ δὲ ἐπιθυμητικὸν Ἀφροδίτῃ, τὸ δὲ αἰσθητικὸν Ἥλιῳ, τὸ δὲ φυτικὸν Σελήνῃ, καὶ τὸ μὲν αὐγοειδὲς ὄχημα τῷ οὐρανῷ, τὸ δὲ θνητόν τοῦτο τῷ ὑπὸ σελήνῃ. ἴν’ οὖν καὶ μερικῶς ἴδῃς τὸ ὅλον, ὁ περὶ ἀνθρώπου λόγος τῇ πάσῃ φυσιολογίᾳ συντέτακται.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* I.6 and I.7.

¹⁰⁵ SH XXIII. 28-29.

VII. Possible Objections

The evidence of correspondences between the heavenly gods and the seven pairs of torments/powers requires additional research. A first objection could pertain to the choice of the specific words chosen in CH XIII for the description of the planetary spheres. For example, why is ἀκρασία (incontinence) the torment connected to Mars, and not ὀργή (anger) or προπέτεια (recklessness or rashness)? The last two terms are also included in the list of the twelve torments, and would be, at least from an astrological standpoint, far more appropriate keywords in order to designate the ‘passionate’ dimension of the star of Ares. A possible reply to this legitimate question pertains to the Platonic division of the irrational soul into the spirited and appetitive parts which seem to be reflected in the spheres of Ares and Aphrodite respectively. The former needs to be restrained (ἐγκράτεια), while the latter to be contained patiently (καρτερία). Hence, ἀκρασία seems to be a suitable choice in order to designate the opposite of ἐγκράτεια.

Another reason which may justify the choice of the specific words relates to numerology. The torments have to be twelve, since ‘this tent [...] was constituted from the zodiacal circle, which was in turn constituted of [] entities that are twelve in number’.¹⁰⁶ The text highlights though that ‘these are twelve in number, but under them are many more besides, my child, and they use the prison of the body to torture the inward person with the sufferings of sense’.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, the text seems to allow for some permeability in the use of the twelve vices. As Hermes states: ‘To mankind’s confusion, there are disjunctions (διαζυγαί) among the twelve [...] though they are unified when they act. Recklessness is not separate from anger; they are indistinguishable’.¹⁰⁸ So, on the one hand, the text allows for some fluidity and penetrability in the choice of the twelve torments, notably for numerological considerations (Dodecade defeated by the Decad which equals the Monad),¹⁰⁹ and, on the other hand, perhaps the choice of the precise words was motivated by phonetic or other kinds of considerations which could relate to a possible ritual dimension. Even though such a

¹⁰⁶ CH XIII. 12, tr. Copenhaver.

¹⁰⁷ CH XIII. 7, tr. Copenhaver.

¹⁰⁸ CH XIII. 12, tr. Copenhaver.

¹⁰⁹ This is another obvious Pythagorean element in the text. Mahé (1991) 363 suggests that Αἰών (composed of the letter α, equivalent of number 1 in Greek, and the letter ι, equivalent of number 10, plus ὦν, ‘the one that is’) stands for the unbegotten God of the Tenth Sphere in *Disc. 8-9*, NHC VI.6, 59, 6-7.

suggestion is merely speculative, CH XIII contains ritual instructions involving sun-worship. The Secret Hymnody at the end of the tractate has to be performed as follows: ‘standing in the open air, face the south wind when the setting sun descends, and bow down in adoration; when the sun returns, bow likewise toward the east’.¹¹⁰

VIII. The Heavenly Gods in their Dual Dimension: From the Zodiacal Circle to the Intelligible Cosmos

The suggestion of correspondences between the heavenly gods and the first seven pairs of torments/powers may bestow some further insight into the relation between zodiacal signs and planets in the course of the process of divinization in CH XIII. In the *Korē Kosmou*, the circle of the zodiac is of divine origin, but nevertheless carries the burden of introducing the soul into materiality, by shaping it in accordance with the zodiacal signs which are liable to passion and corporeal imbalances,¹¹¹ often associated with imbalances in the equilibrium of the four elements (Fire, Air, Water, Earth).¹¹² In CH XIII the fatalistic nature of the zodiac is accentuated by its direct correlation with the twelve torments.¹¹³ However, according to the astrological doctrine of planetary domiciles, the twelve zodiacal signs are associated with and ruled by the seven planetary gods, with five of them (the exception being the Luminaries) assuming the rulership of two signs.

Nevertheless, besides their connection with the fateful bonds of the zodiac and their status as Lords of destiny, the seven heavenly gods may also convey divine intelligences, bestowing gifts to human souls.¹¹⁴ In CH III. 3-4, it is by means of the course of the cycling gods that the incarnate souls are able to ‘contemplate heaven, the course of the heavenly gods, the works of god and the working of nature; to examine things that are good; to know divine power’.¹¹⁵ In *Ascl.* 19, there is discussion on the relation between intelligible and visible gods. The

¹¹⁰ CH XIII. 16. 4-7 οὕτως οὖν, ᾧ τέκνον, σταῖς ἐν ὑπαίθρῳ τόπῳ, νότῳ ἀνέμῳ ἀποβλέπων περὶ καταφορὰν τοῦ ἡλίου δύνοντος, προσκύνει· ὁμοίως καὶ ἀνιόντος πρὸς ἀπηλιώτην (tr. Copenhaver). Festugière (2014) 1670-1671 [IV 244-245] remarks the resemblance of this ritual prescription with *Ascl.* 41.

¹¹¹ Cf. the creation of the zodiacal signs by God in SH XXIII. 18-20.

¹¹² On the four elements and the soul, see SH XXIV.18; SH XXVI.13-30; *Ascl.* 9.

¹¹³ CH XIII. 12.

¹¹⁴ SH XXIII. 28-29.

¹¹⁵ CH III.3, tr. Copenhaver.

heavenly gods are presented as following the intelligible ones,¹¹⁶ the former being gods who have a ‘head-<of>-ousia’ (princeps οὐσία<ς>) and are ‘true to both their origins’: on the one hand, they produce everything throughout nature and, on the other, each of them *illuminates* (*inluminans*) their own work.¹¹⁷ In NHC VI.8, which is a Coptic translation of a large selection from the middle part of *The Perfect Discourse*, the astral gods came into being out of a *pure* form of matter, and their immortality assumed for them the position of learning and knowledge.¹¹⁸

The heavenly energies as ‘pure’ *essences per se* reflect the noetic realm. Besides the privileged status of the astrological knowledge of the decans as a means of attaining godlikeness in Hermetism,¹¹⁹ the whole cosmos constitutes the epiphany of the divine in CH V. 2-3, while in *Ascl.* 34 the sensible universe is covered over by the intelligible cosmos as if by a garment. In CH XIII. 21 Hermes corrects Tat when the latter claimed to have established the secret hymn within his world (ἐν κόσμῳ τῷ ἐμῷ), by clarifying to him that he had better refer to the ‘intellectual’ (ἐν τῷ νοητῷ) cosmos. Hermes seems to emphasize that the goal of the whole process of rebirth is to transform the initiate’s state of consciousness, in such a way that the manifest universe may be unveiled into its ‘intelligible’ dimension. Once the initiated managed to perceive the heavenly emanations in their *essence* as reflections of intelligible principles, they were likely to attain synchronization with the spherical revolutions of the heavenly gods,¹²⁰ and ultimately with the first luminous vehicle, their immaterial and ‘intellectual’ body. This teaching was complementary with the Hermetic doctrine that when the human intellect leaves the corporeal body, once the soul’s vehicle has been purified from the planetary accretions (ἐνδύματα), it gains a fiery body, reminder of the planets and the second Demiurgic *Noūs*, all made of fire

¹¹⁶ The connection and union of the visible with the intelligible gods is highlighted in Iamblichus, *DM* I. 19.

¹¹⁷ *Ascl.* 19, tr. Copenhagen, my italics.

¹¹⁸ NHC VI. 8, 67, 12-21. For NHC VI. 8, see Robinson (1978) 330-338; Mahé (2019) 135-191, esp. 154, n. on NHC VI. 8. 67, 12-21.

¹¹⁹ SH VI, especially SH VI. 18.

¹²⁰ In CH X. 7 deification is intended as the change of souls toward a happier lot, so that the initiated and virtuous soul could gradually be transformed into a *daimōn*, possessing the beginning of immortality, and ‘then enter the troop of gods, which is really two troops, one wandering, the other fixed’ (tr. Copenhagen). This is a clear reference to the astral gods, that is to say the planets and the fixed stars.

and spirit.¹²¹ Consequently, the reestablishment of a solid connection of the soul to their spherical essence mirroring the realm of Intellect may be of great service to the soul's ascent toward the higher sphere of their Creator, the second Demiurgic *Noūs*.

Thus, it is hardly surprising that the reborn Tat acquires in CH XIII.11 a heavenly vehicle, a new, immaterial body which reunites him creatively with the cosmos as if he were a new demiurge: 'I am in heaven, in earth, in water, in air; I am in animals, in plants, in the womb, after the womb; everywhere'.¹²² A bit further on, Tat specifies: 'Father, I see the universe and I see myself in mind'.¹²³ As Gregory Shaw eloquently remarks, Hermetic rebirth allows the initiates to recover their immortal body and participate in demiurgy, since '*rebirth is realized as giving birth, not escaping from the world but creating it*'.¹²⁴

IX. Conclusion

The rationale for establishing parallels between the first seven torments and the planets is based on triggering the corporeal-based reception of the heavenly emanations. The fateful *nature* of the torments would vaguely echo the original *essence* of the seven divine intelligences. Nevertheless, since Tat had already been trained in becoming 'a stranger to the cosmos', he was capable of following Hermes' instructions: 'Draw it to you, and it will come.¹²⁵ Wish it, and it happens. Leave the senses of the body idle, and the birth of divinity will begin. Cleanse yourself of the irrational torments of matter'.¹²⁶ With the subsequent arrival of the first seven of the ten powers, the

¹²¹ CH X.16. 3-5 ὁ δὲ νοῦς καθαρὸς γενόμενος τῶν ἐνδυμάτων, θεῖος ὢν φύσει, σώματος πυρίνου λαβόμενος περιπολεῖ πάντα τόπον; CH I.18, 1-3 ὅταν οὖν ὁ νοῦς ἀπαλλαγῇ τοῦ γήινου σώματος, τὸν ἴδιον εὐθὺς ἐνεδύσατο χιτῶνα, τὸν πύρινον, ὃν οὐκ ἐδύνατο ἔχων εἰς τὸ γήινον σῶμα κατοικῆσαι. For the heavenly gods as made of fire and spirit, see CH I.16; CH III.2. For their begetter, the Demiurge-second *Noūs*, made of fire and spirit, see CH I. 9.

¹²² CH XIII. 11, tr. Copenhagen. Scott II 391 points out the resemblance of this description with CH XI. 20.

¹²³ CH XIII. 13, tr. Copenhagen.

¹²⁴ Shaw (2015) 158, italics by the author.

¹²⁵ Dodds (1965) 76, n. 5 holds that 'the candidate for divinization has to "draw in" [...] the divine breath'. See also *PGM* IV. 537-40, 628-30.

¹²⁶ CH XIII. 7 ἐπίσπασαι εἰς ἑαυτόν, καὶ ἐλεύσεται· θέλησον, καὶ γίνεται· κατάργησον τοῦ σώματος τὰς αἰσθήσεις, καὶ ἔσται ἡ γένεσις τῆς θεότητος· κάθαραι σεαυτὸν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀλόγων τῆς ὕλης τιμωρίων. (tr. Copenhagen).

disciple could experience the heavenly powers reestablished in their pure *essence* by the grace of *Noūs*, instead of passively suffering their fateful *nature* through the embodied soul.

Thus, the initiated could progressively attain godlikeness and grasp the authentic *essence* of the heavenly powers in due order: the solar revelation of the knowledge of god, its lunar reflection as knowledge of joy, the subsequent martial strength to attain self-control and temperance, followed by the containment of earthly appetites by transforming them into steadfastness in the pursuit of noetic beauty (Οὐράνια Ἀφροδίτη). Then, like the illuminated philosopher of the myth of the cave, one would be able to come back and share or teach within society (Zeus), and consolidate the impersonal laws of cosmic justice (Cronus). Finally, the potential to follow ‘the path of immortality’ by becoming Hermes in the long tradition of Hermetic mystagogues was likely to anticipate the entrance into the Eighth Sphere, where identification with the demiurgic *Noūs* could be attained. Ultimately, in the Ninth Sphere, rebirth was rather intended as a ‘return’ (ἐπιστροφή) to the purity of the Primordial human being who, once reinstated into its rightful position as son of God, would be transmuted into ζῶη καὶ φῶς.

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