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Contributed Paper

# In What Sense Does the Death of Philosophers Never Follow upon the Natural Death? Porphyry's *Sententiae* 9

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## Abstract

The starting point of this paper is a proposition in Porphyry's *Sententiae*. There he says, "death is of two sorts: the one is the generally recognised one involving the loosing of the body from the soul; the other is that of the philosophers, involving the soul loosing itself from the body" (9, 1–3). What is most problematic is the last passage of this Sentence: *καὶ οὐ πάντως ὁ ἕτερος τῷ ἑτέρῳ ἔπεται*. This can be translated as "it is not always necessary that either should follow upon the other" or "it is never the case that either should follow upon the other".

I read this line as a denial of both the natural death as a consequence of the death of philosophers and the reverse. However, it is not my aim to present a clear-cut solution to this problem, which seems to be impossible. Rather, considering what Porphyry understands as the death of philosophers, I would like to give an insight into the *Sententiae* themselves, and into the fact that this work is entitled "*Pathways to the Intelligible*" (*Ἀφορμαὶ πρὸς τὰ νοητά*) in the manuscripts.

After resuming the problems that arouse from this passage, I briefly sketch the background of the argument. The source text is certainly Plato's *Phaedo*. It becomes clear that the problem Sentence 9 contains is already implied in this Platonic dialogue.

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Next, before making a concluding remark, I embark upon an explanation of what the death of philosophers means in the ontology of Neoplatonism. It is to be treated together with the notion of *ἐπιστροφή* or *κάθαρσις*, which Porphyry (and of course Plotinus) inherited from Plato. And it becomes indispensable to interpret the death in relation to the degree of virtues fully discussed in Sentence 32. The survey on these matters makes it clearer in what sense the death of philosophers is not connected to the natural death.

## 1. Introductory Question

The starting point of this paper is a proposition stated in the *Sententiae* of Porphyry: there are two types of death, one being the death known to all, in which the body is detached from the soul, another being the death of philosophers, in which case the soul detaches itself from the body. He says:

Ἄθνατος διπλοῦς, ὁ μὲν οὖν συνεγνωσμένος λυομένου τοῦ σώματος ἀπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς, ὁ δὲ τῶν φιλοσόφων λυομένης τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος· καὶ οὐ πάντως ὁ ἕτερος τῶ ἑτέρω ἔπεται. (9, 1–4<sup>1</sup>)

Death is of two sorts: one is the generally recognised one, involving the loosening of the body from the soul; the other is that of the philosophers, involving the soul loosening of itself from the body; and it is not always necessary that either should follow

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<sup>1</sup> The text is that of the new edition by CNRS (*Porphyre Sentences, études d'introduction, texte grec et traduction française, commentaire par l'Unité Propre de Recherche n°76 du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*, éd. sous la responsabilité de L. Brisson, tome I, Paris: J. Vrin, 2005, pp. 308–378). When I cite the text, I refer to the number of each section, which is called 'Sentence', and the lines of the same edition. Here '9, 1–4' stands for 'lines 1–4 of Sentence 9'. What I add to the cited text throughout this paper is—for the sake of clearer comprehension—put in {braces}.

upon the other<sup>2</sup>.

As J. Dillon points out in his note on the translation, *οὐ πάντως* of the last passage can not only be read as a partial negative, but also as a strengthened negative, which is the reading of the CNRS team: «Et en aucun cas (*οὐ πάντως*) l'une n'est la conséquence de l'autre».

On the one hand, if we should understand *οὐ πάντως* in this way, the subject (*ὁ ἕτερος*) will stand for the natural death, and the dative object (*τῷ ἑτέρῳ*) for the death of philosophers: to die naturally never leads to the death of philosophers<sup>3</sup>. J. Dillon seems to consent to this point, when he admits that “his {sc. Porphyry’s} general point is clear”, even though he takes *οὐ πάντως* to be the partial negative. At least, one can affirm that by distinguishing two types of death, Porphyry did imply the discontinuity between natural death and that of philosophers. In fact, it is unlikely for a philosopher to insist on the death of philosophers (detachment of the soul from the body) as a consequence of natural death. Thus there would be no need for philosophy at all.

On the other hand, the passage would also imply the negation of the contrary case, namely the rejection of the natural death as a consequence of the death of philosophers. For instance, if this consequence should connote suicide, this case should also be dismissed. Because again, it is unlikely for a Platonic philosopher to accept this pos-

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<sup>2</sup> With slight modifications, I will hereafter adopt the English translation of J. Dillon contained in the second volume of the edition of CNRS. Cf. L. Brisson (éd.), *op. cit.* [n. 1], tome II, pp. 795–835. In the citation, the phrases in (parenthesis) are those supplemented by J. Dillon, except for the Greek words.

<sup>3</sup> This is how L. Brisson interprets this passage. See the note on the translation contained in the second volume (*op. cit.* [n. 1], tome II, p. 400). Hereafter, when I refer to the notes that each member of CNRS gives to each Sentence, I will only mention the name of the author and the pages in [square brackets]. *E. g.* L. Brisson [400].

sibility, since in the *Phaedo* Plato says that suicide is “forbidden” (61C10, οὐ θεμιτόν) or “not holy” (62A6, μὴ ὅσιον). Besides it was Plotinus, Porphyry’s master, who, having detected that Porphyry was considering suicide, prevented it and sent him to Sicily for mental recuperation<sup>4</sup>.

But does Porphyry really deny the possibility of suicide as the consequence of the death of philosophers? I do not presume that this is what “οὐ πάντως ὁ ἕτερος τῶ ἑτέρῳ ἔπεται” purports. Although it is probably impossible to determine with certainty what Porphyry really means, this paper aims at giving an insight into the *Sententiae* itself through the analysis of “the death of philosophers”.

Provisionally, I assume that the two types of death are not connected to each other, neither of them being a consequence of or a condition for the other<sup>5</sup>. The detachment of the body from the soul (the natural death) and that of the soul from the body (the philosopher’s death) do not depict one and the same event from two different perspectives. These are two different matters. In which sense the latter death does not follow upon the former is the question to be

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Porphyrius, *Vita Plotini* (in: *Plotini Opera*, tomus I, edd. P. Henry and H.-R. Schwyzer, Oxford University Press, 1964), chap. 11; *De abstinentia* I (éd. J. Bouffartigue et M. Patillon, tome I, Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1977), 38, 2, *Βίᾱ μὲν τοίνυν ἑαυτὸν ὁ φιλοσοφῶν οὐκ ἐξάξει*. Plotinus, however, under the influence of Stoicism, allows suicide in extreme circumstances. Later Neoplatonists up to Olympiodorus inherit this exceptional case of suicide. Cf. Olympiodorus, *In Phaedonem* (*The Greek Commentaries on Plato’s Phaedo*, vol. I Olympiodorus, ed. L. G. Westerink, Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1976), 1, 8 (see also the note *ad loc.* of the editor).

<sup>5</sup> This was how we comprehended this passage when we translated it into Japanese. Cf. ‘Porphyry *Sentences*, chaps. 1–32 (Japanese Translation)’, transl. S. Horié and Y. Nishimura, in: *Language, Culture and Communication* 41 (Bulletin of Keio University) [「ポルフェリオス『新プラトン主義命題集成 センテンチアエ——知性的なものへの跳躍台——』第1–32章 邦訳」堀江聡・西村洋平共訳, 『日吉紀要 言語・文化・コミュニケーション』第41号], 2009, pp. 164–165, n. 27.

tackled in this paper. First of all, let us take a look at the philosophical background of the death of philosophers.

## 2. Plato's *Phaedo*: The Source Text

It was definitely the *Phaedo* by Plato that had a strong influence on Neoplatonic philosophers when it comes to dealing with the issue of death<sup>6</sup>.

And that being dead is this: the body's having come to be apart, separated from the soul, alone by itself, and the soul's being apart, alone by itself, separated from the body? Death can't be anything else but that, can't it? (*Phaed.*, 64C5–8<sup>7</sup>)

Here Plato defines death as separation from two different perspectives: the viewpoint of the body and that of the soul. The emphasis is of course laid on the latter. Thus Socrates recapitulates; “And is it just this (τοῦτό γε) that is named “death”—a release and parting of soul from body?” (67D4–5) This death linked to the restriction of γε is not the death that his interlocutors understood when they laughed at Socrates when he insisted that the philosopher would be willing to follow death. What he meant by this death was the way philosophers live. Hence Socrates claims that “as far as he can stand aside from it {sc. body}, {the attention of such a man} is directed towards the soul” (64E5–6, καθ' ὅσον δύναται ἀφεστάναι αὐτοῦ {sc.

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<sup>6</sup> Concerning Sentence 9, H.-R. Schwyzer refers directly back to Plato. Cf. H.-R. Schwyzer, ‘Plotinisches und Unplotinisches in den Ἀφορμαί des Porphyrios’, in: *Plotino e il Neoplatonismo in Oriente e in Occidente*, Roma: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1974, S. 246.

<sup>7</sup> I adopt the translation of D. Gallop (*Plato. Phaedo*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975) with slight modifications. Plato's text is the edition of Oxford Classical Texts (ed. J. Burnet, 1900 [reprint 1967]).

σώματος}, πρὸς δὲ τὴν ψυχὴν τετράφθαι), and that “the philosopher differs from other men in releasing his soul, as far as possible, from its communion with the body” (64E8–65A2, ὁ φιλόσοφος ἀπολύων ὅτι μάλιστα τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ σώματος κοινωνίας διαφερόντως τῶν ἄλλων ἀνθρώπων).

The death of philosophers is not the destruction of a living being or a soul. The soul itself is immortal. The death of philosophers is the separation from the relation our soul forges with a body<sup>8</sup>. And for a man like Socrates, the natural death is nothing but “a journey” (67C1, ἀποδημία; cf. 117C2, τὴν μετοίκησιν τὴν ἐνθένδε ἐκεῖσε) of the soul, which survives after its liberation from the body. The two deaths are similar in as much as both are the separation of the soul from the body. Nonetheless, the death of philosophers does not coincide with another death. Therefore, in the passages cited above, Socrates insists on the philosophical exercise with restriction, such as “as far as he can” (καθ’ ὅσον δύναται), or “as far as possible” (ὅτι μάλιστα). This reveals the fact that the real activity of philosophers (Plato calls it φρόνησις, 66E3 *et passim*) is only accomplished when they die a natural death. The goal being clear, the process towards it is a matter of great importance. Plato calls this process “purification” (67C5 *et passim*, κάθαρσις).

What Porphyry has in mind when he distinguishes the two types of death in Sentence 9 is of course the *Phaedo*. Like Plato, he thinks that the death belonging to philosophers consists of a psychic relation to the body.

A soul binds itself to body through directing its attention (τῆ ἐπι-  
στροφῆ) towards the affections which derive from it, and is freed

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. D. Gallop, *op. cit.* [n. 7], pp. 86–87; L. Brisson, ‘La parti mortali dell’anima o la morte come oblio del corpo’, in: *Interiorità e anima*. La psychè in Platone, a cura di M. Migliori, L. M. Napolitano Valditara e A. Fermani, Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2007, p. 31.

from it, in turn, through the impassibility (*διὰ τῆς ἀπαθείας*). (7, 1–2)

*ἐπιστροφή* usually denotes the conversion of the lower entity to the higher, but here it is used in an ordinary sense, such as “direct one’s attention to”. It is through this attention towards the affections (*πάθη*) that the soul is tied to the body. Porphyry elsewhere rephrases this body-oriented tendency of the soul as a “passionate inclination” (*προσπάθεια*<sup>9</sup>) towards the body. The death of philosophers in Sentence 9 is in a strict sense to stop turning its attention towards the bodily affections. One can recall the claim of Socrates here, *i. e.* that the attention of a philosopher “is directed towards the soul” (64E6, *πρὸς δὲ τὴν ψυχὴν τετράφθαι*).

According to Porphyry, turning away from the body is accomplished through the “impassibility” (*ἀπάθεια*) of the soul. This ideal state of a Stoic sage is combined with the Platonic purification.

The virtues, on the other hand, of the person who is making progress (*προκόπτοντος*<sup>10</sup>) towards the state of contemplation consist in detaching oneself from the things of this realm; hence these are also termed “purifications”, being seen as consisting in absten-

<sup>9</sup> Cf. 28, 10; 29, 10; 29, 12; 32,107. J. Pépin [598] supposes that this peculiar word, which has no occurrence in Plotinus, might be of Stoic origin and takes it as the opposite of *ἀπάθεια*. Following him, I interpret this word as equivalent with “directing its attention towards the affections” (7, 1–2, *ἡ ἐπιστροφή ἢ πρὸς τὰ πάθη*). J. Dillon’s translation of *προσπάθεια* is a rather free one and varies depending on the context. I translate it here as “passionate inclination”. Interestingly, Porphyry uses this word to depict our inclination to the being which is higher in the ontological order. Cf. *Porphyrii philosophi fragmenta*, ed. A. Smith, Stuttgart/Leipzig: Teubner, 1993, fr. 274, 21–23 [=Stobaeus III, 581, 1–2, ed. O. Hense], *φιλοσοφία μὲν γὰρ ἐπετηδεύθη ἐκ προσπαθείας ἡμῶν τῆς πρὸς τὸ σοφόν*.

<sup>10</sup> This is also the technical term of Stoic ethics. Cf. O. Luschkat, ‘Das Problem des ethischen Fortschritts in der alten Stoa’, *Philologus* 102, 1958, SS. 178–214. According to L. G. Westerink, the direct source of the term for

tion from actions in concert with the body and from sympathies with the body. For without doubt these virtues are those of a soul which is in the process of abstracting itself (from the body) in the direction of true being. [...] For this reason, at the purificatory level, “to exercise wisdom” (*τὸ φρονεῖν*)<sup>11</sup> consists in the soul’s not sharing any opinions with the body, but acting on its own, and this is perfected by the pure exercise of the intellect. (32, 15–25)

Detaching (*ἀπόστασις*), abstention (*ἀποχή*) and abstracting itself (*ἀφίστασθαι*) from everything concerned with body belong to the purificatory virtues, which are characterised as “moderation of the passions that has a tendency towards freedom from passion” (32, 136–137, *μετριопάθειαι ἐπίτασιν εἰς ἀπάθειαν λαμβάνουσαι*). When this virtue is accomplished, “an impassive element” (32, 138–139, *τὸ ἀπαθές*) coexists. The aim of this virtue consists in the soul’s acting on its own (*μόνην ἐνεργεῖν*) in the direction of true being (*πρὸς τὸ ὄντως ὄν*). This is called “to exercise wisdom” (*τὸ φρονεῖν*), which, in this context, reminds us of the *Phaedo*<sup>12</sup>. Socrates asserts in the dialogue that “if

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Neoplatonists is Atticus, who has undergone Stoic influence. Cf. *The Greek Commentaries on Plato’s Phaedo*, vol. II Damascius, ed. L. G. Westerink, Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1977, p. 67 (the note ad Damascius, *In Phaed.* I, 100).

<sup>11</sup> As LSJ (*Greek-English Lexicon*, s. v. *φρονέω*) gives, *τὸ φρονεῖν* can be the synonym of *φρόνησις*, the noun which in its turn has a verbal nuance, because of its suffix *-σις*. I translate it as “to exercise wisdom” in order to pick up the verbal sense and to retain the word “wisdom”. I link this word closely with *τὸ νοεῖν* and *νόησις*. See the discussion below and also my footnotes (especially 12; 18–19).

<sup>12</sup> Other Platonic cardinal virtues are mentioned after the passage I have cited, namely “moderation” (32, 26, *τὸ σωφρονεῖν*), “courage” (32, 28, *ἀνδράν*) and “justice” (32, 29, *δικαιοσύνη*). I focus my attention on *τὸ φρονεῖν* here, which is according to my interpretation concerned with the contemplation of true being. As I will argue shortly, this passage is based on Plotinus’

we're ever going to know anything purely, we must be rid of it {sc. body}, and must view the objects themselves with the soul by itself" (66D8-E 2, *εἰ μέλλομέν ποτε καθαρώς τι εἶσεσθαι, ἀπαλλακτέον αὐτοῦ* {sc. σώματος} *καὶ αὐτῇ τῇ ψυχῇ θεατέον αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα*), namely the forms, the hypothesis of which is examined later through the reminiscence (cf. 72E3 *sqq.*). In the purification process, the soul is "to live, so far as it can, both in the present and in the hereafter, released from the body" (67C9-D1, *οἰκεῖν κατὰ τὸ δυνατὸν καὶ ἐν τῷ νῦν παρόντι καὶ ἐν τῷ ἔπειτα μόνῃ* {sc. ψυχῇ} *καθ' αὐτήν, ἐκλυομένην ὥσπερ [ἐκ] δεσμῶν ἐκ τοῦ σώματος*)<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, he describes what can be attained (after death) through purification as "that which we desire and of which we claim to be lovers, namely wisdom" (66 E2-3, *οὗ ἐπιθυμοῦμέν τε καὶ φαμεν ἔρασταὶ εἶναι, φρονήσεως*).

It is remarkable that Porphyry too uses the term derived from "wisdom". Of course, it was Plotinus who, in the treatise called *On Virtues* (I, 2), firstly arranged the virtues that had been treated in different dialogues by Plato. He differentiated the virtues in the *Republic* (including *φρόνησις*) from those in the *Phaedo*, and combined the latter with the assimilation to the god of the *Theaetetus*<sup>14</sup>. It is true

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*Ennead* I, 2, but its source is apparently the *Phaedo* 69A6-B5. Commenting on this passage, Damascius regards "wisdom" (*φρόνησις*) as the characteristic of contemplation. Cf. Damascius, *In Phaed.* I, 152, 1-3, "Ἡ δὲ αὕτη {sc. ἀνδρεία} τὴν καθαρτικὴν εἰδοποιεῖ ζωὴν, ὡς τὴν ἡθικὴν ἢ σωφροσύνη, τὴν δὲ πολιτικὴν ἢ δικαιοσύνη, τὴν δὲ θεωρητικὴν ἢ φρόνησις.

<sup>13</sup> See also the definition of death as "the soul's being apart, alone by itself, separated from the body" (*Phaed.*, 64C6-8, *χωρὶς δὲ τὴν ψυχὴν [ἀπὸ] τοῦ σώματος ἀπαλλαγείσαν αὐτὴν καθ' αὐτὴν εἶναι*), cited at the beginning of this section.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. H.-R. Schwyzer, art. cit. [n. 6], S. 224. As to the corresponding passages of the *Sententiae* to the *Enneads* of Plotinus, see the work of C. D'Ancona, who besides the references already indicated by other editors and authors (including H.-R. Schwyzer), adds her own and classifies them into the passages pertaining to Plotinus' treatises *ad verbum* and *ad sensum*. C. D'Ancona, 'Les Sentences de Porphyre entre les *Ennéades* de Plotin et les *Éléments de théologie* de Proclus', in: L. Brisson (éd.), *op. cit.* [n. 1], pp. 139-274.

that Porphyry bases himself on Plotinus, yet there are some original interpretations<sup>15</sup>. At first, let us take a look at the text of Plotinus:

εἴη ἂν ἀγαθὴ καὶ ἀρετὴν ἔχουσα {sc. ἡ ψυχὴ}, εἰ μήτε συνδοξάζουσι,  
ἀλλὰ μόνη ἐνεργοῖ—ὅπερ ἐστὶ νοεῖν τε καὶ φρονεῖν. (19 [I, 2], 3,  
13–15)

It {sc. the soul} will be good and possess virtue when it no longer has the same opinions {with the body} but acts alone—this is to exercise intellect and wisdom<sup>16</sup>.

Interestingly enough Porphyry does not enumerate *νοεῖν* and *φρονεῖν* as two different activities. I will cite the relevant passage of Sentence 32 again.

τὸ μὲν μὴ συνδοξάζειν τῷ σώματι, ἀλλὰ μόνην ἐνεργεῖν ὑφίστησι τὸ  
φρονεῖν, ὃ διὰ τοῦ καθαρῶς νοεῖν τελειοῦται. (32, 23–25)

“To exercise wisdom” consists in the soul’s not sharing any opinions with the body, but acting on its own, and this is perfected by the pure exercise of the intellect.

According to Porphyry *φρονεῖν* is accomplished through *νοεῖν*.

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<sup>15</sup> It is probable that when Porphyry wrote the *Sententiae*, he had used the commentaries on the *Enneads*, that he attested to have written (*Vita Plotini*, 26, 28–37). Cf. M.-O. Goulet-Cazé, ‘Le genre littéraire des *Sentences*’, in: L. Brisson (éd.), *op. cit.* [n. 1], pp. 28–29. Whether Porphyry had used his commentary on Plato’s *Phaedo*, of which existence we know of from the testimonies of the later commentators such as Olympiodorus, is far from clear.

<sup>16</sup> The English Translation is that of A. H. Armstrong (*Plotinus I*, The Loeb Classical Library, 1966) with slight modifications. The Greek text is that of Oxford Classical Texts (edd. P. Henry and H.-R. Schwyzler, 1964).

What is at stake is not the distinction between theoretical and practical wisdom. Here we should not fall prey to Aristotle's considerable influence and take τὸ φρονεῖν as "prudence"<sup>17</sup>. Rather it should be understood as the intellectual activity or the contemplation of the soul without the body<sup>18</sup>. This is what Plato intended to describe when he used φρόνησις in the *Phaedo*<sup>19</sup>.

### 3. *κάθαρσις* and *ἐπιστροφή* of the Soul in the *Sententiae*

Although the influence is obvious, does Porphyry imply that the death of philosophers cannot be accomplished before the natural death, as Socrates did? As to this, let us now examine what Porphyry means asserting that the death of philosophers is the purification (*κάθαρσις*) and turning away (*ἐπιστροφή*) from the body. This, however, cannot be understood without the assumption of the Neoplatonic ontology.

Of those realities which are universal and perfect none has its attention turned (*ἐπέστραπται*) towards its own offspring, but all direct themselves upwards to their generators. (30, 1–3)

These realities (*ὑποστάσεις*) include the body of the cosmos (τὸ κοσμοκὸν σῶμα), the soul of the cosmos (ἡ ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ), the Intellect (ὁ νοῦς), and the First (τὸ πρῶτον). They constitute the causal hierarchy of

<sup>17</sup> It is «sous réserve» (cf. L. Brisson et J.-M. Flamand [632]) that the French translation of CNRS adopts the word "prudence". J. Dillon in his note on the English translation *ad loc.* explains τὸ φρονεῖν simply as "practical".

<sup>18</sup> This might also be how Plotinus understands φρόνησις. See 19 [I, 2], 6, 12–13, σοφία μὲν καὶ φρόνησις ἐν θεωρίᾳ ὧν νοῦς ἔχει, which Porphyry paraphrases word by word (32, 57).

<sup>19</sup> For this point, see N. Notomi, 'La metafisica come risveglio dell'anima. Una lettura etica del *Fedone* di Platone', in: M. Migliori, *et al.* (a cura), *op. cit.* [n. 8], pp. 207–208 (especially n. 9).

beings, and each turns respectively towards its cause<sup>20</sup>. It is a general principle in Neoplatonic philosophy that what is caused is inferior to its cause<sup>21</sup>. And through *ἐπιστροφή* each reality becomes similar to the object which it turns back to. So the soul possesses an intellectual activity, and the Intellect has in its Intellection the unity and the oneness, of which the First or the One is the cause. Thus *ἐπιστροφή* denotes the fact that what is caused has differences as well as similarities with regard to its cause. Since their *ἐπιστροφή* is only directed to their cause, universal beings always remain what they are. However, in the case of particular beings, *ἐπιστροφή* has another inclination.

It is proper to particular realities, however, which can incline themselves towards many objects, to direct their attention also (*καί*) to their offspring. (30, 11–13)

What Porphyry understands as particular realities here are individual souls. Bodies are their offspring (*τὰ γεννήματα*), in so far as souls animate them and use them as an instrument. The two different ways of being or living are possible for our particular souls; one of which is better and the other worse. The soul lives either by turning its attention to the body or by turning towards the Intellect.

As I have already indicated, turning to the body is characterised as a “passionate inclination” (*προσπάθεια*). Moreover, it has to be noted that the soul itself, being incorporeal, is not affected, for “to be affected” (*πάσχειν*) accompanies an alteration and a dissolution, which belong to nothing but corporeal things.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. 30, 3–5, *τέλειον γὰρ ὄν* {sc. τὸ κοσμικὸν σῶμα} ἀνήκται πρὸς τὴν φυγὴν νοερὰν οὐσαν, κύκλω διὰ τοῦτο κινούμενον, ἣ δὲ φυγὴ αὐτοῦ πρὸς τὸν νοῦν, νοῦς δὲ πρὸς τὸ πρῶτον.

<sup>21</sup> This is clearly expressed in Proclus' *Elements of Theology* (ed. E. R. Dodds, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963<sup>2</sup>), prop. 7, *πάν τὸ παρακτικὸν ἄλλου κρεϊττον ἔστι τῆς τοῦ παραγομένου φύσεως*. See also W. Kühn [412–417].

[...] those that are near to matter and bodies are themselves, certainly, unaffected, but the things in which they lie are affected. (18, 7–8)

It is the soul that is near to matter and to the body. It forms “the composite” (21, 10–11, τὸ συναμφότερον) with them. This composite is a living being or a human being<sup>22</sup>. If the soul is the cause of a composite, it is not affected by what occurs on the composite<sup>23</sup>, *i. e.* by “sensory experiences<sup>24</sup>” (πάθη). However, our soul turns its attention to πάθη and accelerates these passions. “The sensory experience (τὸ πάθος)”, says Porphyry, “sets itself in motion at the bidding of the reason, which gives it its lead on the basis of its own inclination (διὰ τῆς ῥοπῆς)” (32, 139–140).

When Porphyry talks about “impassibility” (ἀπάθεια) as the goal of purification, it is not the ontological status of the soul with regard to the body, but rather its recuperation from the passionate inclination towards the body. It is the soul that binds itself and inclines to body. And by detaching itself from the body through purification, the soul recovers and accomplishes its impassibility (cf. 7, 1–2 cited above).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Plotinus, 26 [III, 6], 9, 35–37; 53 [I, 1], 5–7; C. D’Ancona, art. cit. [n. 14], pp. 218–219.

<sup>23</sup> Elsewhere Porphyry calls this peculiar relation of the soul with the body “conjunction” (33, 45, σύνοδος). Of course, as he remarks in the same Sentence, it should be distinguished from other corporeal connections, on which occasion he enumerates the four Stoic types of mixture (33, 49–50). On the contrary, it should be understood as “a conjunction of entities which are totally alien from one another in respect of the character of their existence” (33, 46–48, σύνοδον [...] πραγμάτων παντελῶς ἐκβεβηκότων ἀπ’ ἀλλήλων κατ’ ιδιότητα ὑποστάσεως). As to the distinction between the soul and the composite that is composed of the body and the soul, see also the simile of harmony in 18, 8–18.

<sup>24</sup> Thus translates J. Dillon. See his note on 21, 1. Broadly speaking, what occurs in the body is called πάθη.

If the soul is to turn back to its cause, it must first turn to itself. This is how the purification proceeds.

For a start, it is as it were the foundation and underpinning of purification to know oneself as a soul bound down in an alien entity of a quite distinct nature. In the second place, taking one's start from this conviction (*ἀπὸ τούτου ὁρμώμενον τοῦ πείσματος*<sup>25</sup>), one should gather oneself together from the body [...]. (32, 101–105)

“To gather oneself from the body” (*συνάγειν αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος*) does not mean the natural death, that is, the detachment of the body from the soul. It is the activity of the soul that detaches itself from the body. Nor does this entail that the body is completely detached from the soul, since Porphyry lists things or states to be purified as pains, anger and desires (32, 115–127). These presuppose the presence of the body. The purification is the process in our life.

In other words, there still remains “the irrational part” (32, 129, *τὸ ἄλογον*) in the course of the purification, though it obeys “by the proximity of the reasoning part” (32, 131, *τῆ γειτνιάσει τοῦ λογιζομένου*). The purificatory virtue does not belong to the one who has been completely purified, but to “the person who is making progress” (32, 15, *προκόπτοντος*). “No conflict {between the reasoning part and the irrational part}”, affirms Porphyry, “will manifest itself, in consequence of the progress of purification” (32, 132, *Οὐκ ἔσται τοίνυν μάχη προκοπούσης τῆς καθάρσεως*). This is how Porphyry (and Plotinus) interpreted what Socrates had exhorted to pursue as far as possible, if

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<sup>25</sup> In my view this phrase is closely connected to the title given to the manuscript, *Ἀφορμαὶ πρὸς τὰ νοητά*, which conveys the main purpose of Porphyry in the *Sententiae*, namely to exhort readers to separate their soul from the body and to turn their attention to themselves and to the Intellect.

one were to be a true philosopher: “train for dying” (67E5, ἀποθνήσκειν μελετᾶν).

Up to this, the possibility to accomplish the purification is admitted.

We ought therefore to direct our attention most of all to the purificatory virtues, basing ourselves on the reflection that the attainment of these is possible in this life (ἐν τῷ βίῳ τούτῳ), and that it is through these that an ascent may be made to the more august levels. (32, 95–97)

However, the question is, whether it is also possible to accomplish “an ascent to the more august levels” (ἡ εἰς τὰς τιμιωτέρας ἀνοδος). The next level of virtues is traditionally called “contemplative” (θεωρητική)<sup>26</sup>. This still belongs to the soul, but “to the soul as it is exercising intellection” (32, 56–57, νοερώς τῆς ψυχῆς ἐνεργούσης) or “to the soul which has already turned its gaze towards the intellect and is filled with it” (32, 73, ψυχῆς πρὸς νοῦν ἐνορώσης ἤδη καὶ πληρουμένης ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ), whereas the purificatory and civic virtues are both said to be “of the human soul” (32, 74; 76, ψυχῆς ἀνθρώπου)<sup>27</sup>. Is the contemplative virtue attainable while the soul lives together with the body

<sup>26</sup> As H. D. Saffrey and A.-Ph. Segonds observe, it was not Porphyry who used the designation “contemplative” for the third virtue, the first being civic, the second being purificatory, although he made a clear demarcation between the second and the third, while Plotinus had only adumbrated it. Cf. Marinus, *Proclus ou sur le bonheur*, texte établi, traduit et annoté par H. D. Saffrey et A.-Ph. Segonds, avec la collaboration de C. Luna, Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2002, pp. LXIX-C (especially pp. LXXXVIII-XC).

<sup>27</sup> Damascius characterises the purificatory virtue as the soul belonging to oneself, the contemplative virtue as the soul being itself. Cf. *In Phaed.* I, 114, 1–3, “Ὅτι ἡ ψυχὴ συμπάσχουσα μὲν τῷ σώματι ἄλλου γίγνεται, πολιτικῶς δὲ ἐνεργούσα ἑαυτῆς καὶ ἄλλου (κάλλιον δὲ ἄλλου τοῦτο φάναι, ὡς ἐν Πολιτεία δέδεικται), καθαρτικῶς δὲ ἑαυτῆς, θεωρητικῶς δὲ αὐτῆ. As to the obscure reference to the *Republic*, see the note of L. G. Westerink.

in this world? An omission of the restriction “human” (*ἀνθρώπου*) as to the contemplative virtue seems to speak against this.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

Although this possibility must be examined through considerations of later Sentences, where Porphyry takes the intellectual activity of the Intellect and its feasibility for us into account, this is beyond our scope here. Yet, to answer the question raised in the first section of this paper, *i. e.* in what sense the death of philosophers does not follow the natural death, we only have to conclude from the arguments above, how the soul relates with the body.

As I have already mentioned, the soul itself is unaffected by bodily affections. Along the same line, Porphyry defines the soul as follows:

The soul is an essence without magnitude, immaterial, and indestructible, whose being consists in life (*ἐν ζωῇ*) which holds its living from itself. (17, 1–2)

The life of the soul holds its power to live “from itself” (*παρ’ ἐαυτῆς*). As such, it is impossible to talk about the death of the soul except the voluntary death; the purification from the body<sup>28</sup>.

In the case of that essence whose existence consists in life {*sc.* the soul} and whose sensory experiences are modes of life, death

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<sup>28</sup> This can be interpreted and explained by means of the two types of *ἐπιστροφή*, one being ontological and the other voluntary, as M.-O. Goulet-Cazé distinguishes, relying on A. Smith (*Porphyry’s Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974, pp. 20–55). Cf. M.-O. Goulet-Cazé, ‘Le système philosophique de Porphyre dans les *Sentences*, A. Métaphysique’, in: L. Brisson (éd.), *op. cit.* [n. 1], pp. 52–61.

concerns a certain sort of life, not the absolute deprivation of life, because neither, after all, is sensory experience in its case a road to total absence of life. (23, 1–4)

In Sentence 18, denying the fact that the soul might be affected by sensory experiences (*πάθη*), Porphyry says that in the soul “affections are activities” (18, 3, *τὰ πάθη ἐνέργειαι*). Here they are said to be “modes of life” (*ζωαί*). Attitudes of the soul towards sensory experiences decide the mode of life. This confirms what is stated in Sentence 32, where he treats various virtues, each of which is the result of an activity of the soul. And since the soul has a tendency to incline towards sensory experiences instead of turning towards its cause or even itself, and since “in many respects {the body} hinders activities {of the soul}” (37, 30, *πρὸς τὰς ἐνεργείας {τῆς ψυχῆς} ἐν πολλοῖς ἐμποδίζον {τὸ σῶμα}*), these virtues are to be pursued.

Death mentioned in Sentence 23 appears to be the natural death. For the soul, which survives it, the natural death is a form of life. What matters is the mode of life, and that depends on the activity of the soul.

If so, for a philosopher who dies the philosophical death, *i. e.* who is in the process of purification or who has already been purified, the natural death is as trivial as other bodily affections. For sure the natural death does not automatically lead to purification<sup>29</sup>. Nor does the death of philosophers amount to the natural death, not because the philosophers will commit suicide, but because they are purified or are in the process of purification from bodily concerns. They are, so to say, indifferent to whether the body is detached from the

<sup>29</sup> This seems to be the general Neoplatonic reading of the *Phaedo* 64C4–8. Cf. Olympiodorus, *In Phaed.*, 7, 2, 12–15, *καὶ καθολικώτερος ὁ θάνατος τῆς καθάρσεως, διότι ὁ μὲν καθαίρομενος πάντως καὶ ἀποθνήσκει, οὐ μὴν ὁ ἀποθνήσκων καὶ καθαίρεται διὰ τὰς φιλοσομᾶτους ψυχὰς περὶ τοὺς τάφους καὶ μετὰ τὸν θάνατον εἰλουμένας.*

soul, for their soul is already detaching itself from it. It is indeed difficult to draw this conclusion from “οὐ πάντως ὁ ἕτερος τῷ ἐτέρῳ ἔπεται” in Sentence 9, because one will have to interpret the verb “follow upon” (ἔπεται) apart from what it normally conveys. Nevertheless, one can read such a conception of death in Porphyry’s *Sententiae*.

Furthermore, in the eschatological context of Sentence 29, “the pneumatic vehicle” (29, 8, τὸ πνεῦμα) follows the soul after its separation from a body (in a sense of the natural death). And “from the passionate inclination (to the body) an imprint deriving from its imaging faculty rubs off on its pneumatic vehicle, and thus it comes to be dragging along its shade” (29, 12, ἐκ τῆς προσπαθείας {πρὸς τὸ σῶμα} ἐναπομόργνυται τύπος τῆς φαντασίας εἰς τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ οὕτως ἐφέλκεται τὸ εἶδωλον). Even after the natural death, the soul must struggle against the irrational imprint that is stamped on the pneumatic vehicle because of “the passionate inclination” (προσπάθεια) that the soul had towards the body. Contrary to what Damascius reports, it is probably not only the rational or reasoning part of soul that is immortal for Porphyry<sup>30</sup>.

The state of purification is to be maintained even after the natural death. If so, the death of philosophers, as the progress of the soul towards the contemplative virtue, does not follow upon the natural

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Damascius, *In Phaed.* I, 177, 1–7, “Ὅτι οἱ μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς λογικῆς ψυχῆς ἄχρι τῆς ἐμφύχου ἔξεως ἀπαθανατίζουσι, ὡς Νουμήμιος· οἱ δὲ μέχρι τῆς φύσεως, ὡς Πλωτῖνος ἐν ὄπου· οἱ δὲ μέχρι τῆς ἀλογίας, ὡς τῶν μὲν παλαιῶν Ξενοκράτης καὶ Σπεύσιππος, τῶν δὲ νεωτέρων Ἰάμβλιχος καὶ Πλούταρχος· οἱ δὲ μέχρι μόνης τῆς λογικῆς, ὡς Πρόκλος καὶ Πορφύριος· οἱ δὲ μέχρι μόνου τοῦ νοῦ, φθείρουσι γὰρ τὴν δόξαν, ὡς πολλοὶ τῶν Περπατητικῶν· οἱ δὲ μέχρι τῆς ὅλης ψυχῆς, φθείρουσι γὰρ τὰς μερικὰς εἰς τὴν ὅλην. For Proclus too, it is not only the rational part that survives death, otherwise the punishment would not make any sense. On the complicated theory of irrational souls in Proclus, see the subtle analysis of J. Opsomer, ‘Was sind irrationale Seelen?’, in: *Proklos. Methode, Seelenlehre, Metaphysik*, hrsg. M. Perkams und R. M. Piccione, Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2006, SS. 136–166.

death at all. After all, the accomplishment of the contemplative life was probably not a matter of “hope” (*Phaed.*, 67B8 *et passim*, ἐλπίς) for Porphyry, since it totally depends on the activity of the soul. The whole *Sententiae* are directed towards this goal. Hence the Greek title is: Ἀφορμαὶ πρὸς τὰ νοητά (*Pathways to the Intelligible*)<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> It was not Porphyry himself who entitled it like this. However, it clearly purports the intention of the treatise. As to the title, see R. Goulet, ‘Le titre de l’ouvrage’, in: L. Brisson (éd.), *op. cit.* [n. 1], pp. 11–16.