

PHILOSOPHY, HELLENICITY, LAW: PORPHYRY ON ORIGEN, AGAIN

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Abstract: Porphyry's criticism of Origen (in *c.Christ. fr.* 39 Harnack) is usually interpreted as expressive of the 'double apostasy' accusation: Christians had not only abandoned their pagan religious traditions ('Hellenism') but also their new religious host, Judaism, whose texts they misappropriated for themselves. Reading key elements of the fragment within Porphyry's broader philosophical thought prompts suspicion of this cultural interpretation of the fragment, and instead points to a serious Platonic reaction to Christianity.

Keywords: Porphyry, Origen, Hellenism, Eusebius

Unlike most of the 'fragments' collected by Harnack,¹ which come from polemical paraphrases of later critics who sometimes only list Porphyry among other pagans or fail to mention him at all,² Fragment 39 is a purportedly verbatim quotation from the third book of the *Against the Christians*. Nonetheless, the dominant interpretation of the fragment, which has seen it as expressing criticism of Christians for committing double apostasy from both Hellenism and Judaism,³ seems to depend on reconstructions of Porphyry's stance based on the less secure fragments of his anti-Christian polemic⁴ rather than his extant corpus of writings (including the better-attested fragments of other relevant works). Primary elements of Fragment 39 may be assessed more appropriately from consideration of their occurrence within Porphyry's broader philosophical thought and its Platonic background.

The following remarks seek to examine Porphyry's claims that Origen: (1) committed an act of 'barbarian daring'; (2) lived 'outside the law'; (3) was raised a Greek and 'Hellenized in his doctrine'; and (4) 'substituted' Greek ideas for Jewish ones. Consideration of these points leads

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¹ *Porphyrios*, Gegen die Christen, *15 Bucher* (Berlin 1916).

² For useful criticism of Harnack's collection, see A. Benoit, 'Le Contra Christianos de Porphyre: où en est la collecte des fragments?', in *Paganisme, judaïsme, christianisme* (Paris 1978) 261–75; T.D. Barnes, 'Porphyry *Against the Christians*: date and the attribution of fragments', *JThS* 24 (1973) 424–42. For defense of the existence of the *c.Christ.* as a self-standing work, see C. Riedweg, 'Porphyrios über Christus und die Christen', in *L'Apologétique chrétienne gréco-latine à l'époque prénicéenne* (Genève 2005) 151–203; R. Goulet, 'Hypothèses récentes sur le traité de Porphyre *Contre les chrétiens*', in M. Narcy and É. Rebillard (eds), *Hellénisme et*

Christianisme (Villeneuve-d'Ascq 2004) 61–109.

³ See variously, R. Goulet, 'Porphyre, Ammonius, les deux Origène et les autres', in R. Goulet, *Études sur les Vies de philosophes de l'Antiquité tardive* (Paris 2001) 267–290, especially 273; M. Zambon, 'ΠΑΠΑΝΟΜΩΣ ΖΗΝ: La critica di Porfirio ad Origene', in L. Perrone (ed.), *Origeniana Octava* (Leuven 2003) 558; E. Depalma Digeser, 'Christian or Hellene? The great persecution and the problem of identity', in E. Depalma Digeser and R.M. Frakes (eds), *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity* (Toronto 2006) 36–57; J. Schott, "'Living like a Christian, but playing the Greek": accounts of apostasy and conversion in Porphyry and Eusebius', *Journal of Late Antiquity* 1 (2008) 258–77.

⁴ Possibly the most misleading in this regard is the material given as Fragment 1 Harnack (n.1); for criticism of its authenticity, see A.P. Johnson, 'Rethinking the authenticity of Porphyry, *contra Christianos*, fr. 1', *Studia Patristica* 46 (2010) 53–58; S. Morlet, *La Démonstration évangélique d'Eusèbe de Césarée. Étude sur l'apologétique chrétienne à l'époque de Constantin* (Paris 2010) 44–45.

one to conclude that the double apostasy motif, which played a fundamental role in other criticisms of Christianity,⁵ misrepresents the current fragment (and probably the general thrust of the *Against the Christians* itself). Distinctly philosophical concerns are more likely to be at the heart of Porphyry's criticism of Origen rather than cultural apostasy or civic subversion. The fragment marks neither a straightforward defense of traditional civic cult (traditionally understood) nor an attack against Christianity's rejection of Hellenism.

First, I offer a translation of the fragment.⁶

When certain ones wanted to find a solution rather than apostatize from the wickedness of the Jewish Scriptures,⁷ they turned to exegeses which were disjointed (*asunklōstous*)⁸ and inappropriate to what was written, and brought not so much a defense (*apologia*) of the foreign [writings], but an approval and praise (*epainos*) of their own.⁹ For, they brought on their interpretations, boasting that the things said openly by Moses were riddles (*ainigmata*) and invoking them as oracles full of hidden mysteries, and through their vanity enchanting (*katagoēteusantes*) the critical faculty of the soul.¹⁰

And after other things, he says:

The manner of the strangeness (*atopia*) [of Christian exegesis] may be ascertained¹¹ from a man whom I came across when I was still quite young, and who was very well-esteemed and is still well-esteemed through the writings he has left: Origen, whose fame has been passed down as great by the teachers of these arguments (*logoi*).¹² For, having become a disciple of Ammonius who has made the greatest contribution in the field of philosophy in our times, he obtained from his teacher the benefit of great experience in arguments (*logoi*), but in the correct way of life (*orthēn... prohairetin*) he made a path opposite to him. For Ammonius, having been raised a Christian with Christian parents, when he grasped intellectual pursuits and philosophy, immediately converted to the way of life (*politeia*) according to the laws (*nomoi*); but Origen, a Greek trained in Greek arguments (*logoi*), ran aground¹³ on barbarian daring.¹⁴ Indeed, bearing to this [act of daring], he sold himself and his training in arguments (*logoi*), living Christianly and unlawfully (*paranomōs*) in his lifestyle, yet Hellenizing in his doctrines about [material] reality (*ta pragmata*) and the divine and substituting the ideas of the Greeks for foreign myths. For he always consorted with Plato and conversed with the writings of Numenius, Cronius, Apollonphanes, Longinus, Moderatus, Nicomachus and the famous men among the Pythagoreans, and he made use of the books of Chaeremon the Stoic and Cornutus, from whom he learned the allegorical (*metaleptikon*)¹⁵ character of the mysteries among the Greeks and attached them to the Jewish writings. (Fragment 39 Harnack (n.1) [= Eusebius *HE* 6.19.4–8])

⁵ See, for example, Celsus ap. Origen *c.Cels.* 5.25; Maximinus Daia ap. Eus. *HE* 9.7.3–14.

⁶ Translations of Porphyry here and throughout are my own unless otherwise noted.

⁷ Since Porphyry otherwise has a favourable attitude to the Jews throughout his corpus, it may be best to suppose here that he is adopting the language of Origen; cf. Or. *c.Cels.* 2.4–5, 3.64, 4.47 ('what he [Celsus] supposes is the wickedness of our Scriptures...').

⁸ Cf. Porph. *Abst.* 3.18; Hermeias in *Phdr.* p.187A.

⁹ Cf. *On the Styx*, fr. 372 Smith (A. Smith, *Porphyrius. Fragmenta* (Leipzig 1993)) (on Cronius).

¹⁰ Cf. *On the Styx*, fr. 382.40 Smith (n.9) (on the bewitching, *thelgein*, of the soul); cf. *Abst.* 1.27. For discussion, see Zambon (n.3) 555; J.G. Cook, 'Porphyry's attempted demolition of Christian allegory', *International Journal of the Platonic*

Tradition 2 (2008) 12.

¹¹ This translation of *pareilēphthō* seeks to incorporate the insights of Goulet (n.3) 268, n.3; see also Cook (n.10) 3, n.9.

¹² I have translated *logoi* as 'arguments' throughout this fragment to mark the resonance with Pl. *Rep.* 7.539a9, 539d5, which I take to provide a model for Porphyry's critique of Origen here (see below).

¹³ Cf. *Ep.Aneb.* 1, p.8.1–7 Sodano (A.R. Sodano, (ed.), *Porfirio. Lettera ad Anebo* (Naples 1958)).

¹⁴ Porphyry was himself accused of 'barbarian quackery' by Proclus (or Iamblichus); see Proclus, *Comm.Tim.* 1.152–53 (with H. Tarrant, *Proclus: Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* 1.1 (Cambridge 2007) 250, n.648). 'Judaic recklessness' occurs at Julian *c.Galil.* 238b.

¹⁵ For discussion of this term, see Cook (n.10) 10–11.

I. Plotinian metaphysics and Origen's daring

The series of differences between Ammonius and Origen is marked by a formulaic rhythm in which both are identified and their formative influences expressed by a passive participle and a prepositional phrase with *en* repeating their affiliation.¹⁶ The parallelism in Porphyry's description would seem to characterize two identical transformations, moving in opposite directions but along the same pagan-Christian axis. Yet, Porphyry's rhetorical configuration masks fundamental incongruities between the two men. Ammonius and Origen were not simply mirror opposites of each other. Instead, Ammonius' starting point is described in terms of his parents, while Origen's is given in terms of his education. Ammonius has a conversion in terms of transferring to a new lawful way of life, accompanied by a rejection of his past Christian identity; while Origen commits an act of recklessness prompting (or predicated upon) an unlawful way of life, but without a consequent rejection of his past Greek identity. Though Porphyry's succinct formulations suggest a conversion, there is, in fact, a lack of conversion – if we understand conversion to consist of the abandonment of one set of beliefs, lifestyle and identity and the adoption of new ones. Porphyry's description specifies only an incomplete conversion.¹⁷ Before too quickly assuming that the 'barbarian daring (*tolmēma*)' refers to a conversion, an investigation of the range of significations of *tolmēma* for a philosopher working in a Platonic, particularly Plotinian, framework is necessary (we shall postpone consideration of the modifier 'barbarian' until later, since it seems to mark an allusion to a Platonic passage and hence may carry less cultural weight than often supposed).¹⁸

A consistent feature of Plotinus' description of the movement away from the One towards ever greater levels of multiplicity and confusion is the causal factor of *tolma* (and its verbal form, *tolmān*). The movement away from the One, from one hypostasis to another (from Intellect to Soul), and then from the universal Soul to particular souls, ending in their entrance into bodies in the material world, arises from a daring will on the part of the agent.¹⁹ *Tolma* specifically denotes the agent's character trait: a potential or propensity for reckless abandonment of the parent ('father') of its being.

While the various instantiations of daring within the progressively more diffuse multiplicity of being seem to remain morally neutral in Plotinus' thought, the lowest occurrences of *tolma*, comprising the inclination of individual souls toward material bodies, are productive of evil.²⁰

The beginning of evil for them was audacity (*tolma*) and coming to birth and the first otherness and the wishing to belong to themselves. Since they were clearly delighted with their own independence, and made great use of self-movement, running the opposite course and getting as far away (*apostasin*) as possible, they were ignorant even that they themselves came from that world.²¹

Such *tolma* resulted in forgetfulness of the individual soul's divine parentage, an ignorance of its birth and the exhibition of honour for things here but dishonour for itself.²² In their reckless absorption in the embodied condition, Plotinus' description of these souls resembles his description of the Gnostic view of the evil Creator god: in order that he might be honoured, the

¹⁶ This paneling structure (A, B: A', B') is not a proper *chiasmus* (pace Schott (n.3) 265); though admittedly, there is a sort of logical 'chiastic square' (or 'the logicians' square of contradictions'), as discussed by Cook (n.10) 16–17.

¹⁷ Eusebius' summary of Porphyry notwithstanding (*HE* 6.19.9); cf. M. Edwards, 'Ammonius, teacher of Origen', *JEH* 44 (1993) 172–73.

¹⁸ The present discussion greatly extends the brief remarks on *tolmēma* of Zambon (n.3) 557.

¹⁹ See J.M. Rist, 'Plotinus on matter and evil', *Phronesis* 6 (1961) 154–66; J.M. Rist, *Plotinus: The*

Road to Reality (Cambridge 1967) 112–29; N.J. Torchia, *Plotinus, Tolma, and the Descent of Being* (New York 1993); D. Majumdar, 'Is *tolma* the cause of first otherness for Plotinus?' *Dionysius* 23 (2005) 31–48.

²⁰ See, for example, *Enn.* 6.9.5 (Intellect 'dared to stand apart').

²¹ Plot. *Enn.* 5.1.1.4–9 (tr. Armstrong); for discussion, see M. Atkinson, *Plotinus: Ennead VI* (Oxford 1983) 4–12.

²² Plot. *Enn.* 5.1.1.1–17; cf. Porph. *On 'Know Thyself'* fr. 275.11–19 Smith (n.9).

Creator, according to the Gnostics, ‘created through arrogance and *tolma*’.²³ The difference between the Gnostics and Plotinus lay in the latter’s limitation of wicked *tolma* to individual souls and the exculpation from any taint of wickedness on the part of the Intellect or the universal Soul. This point is made clearer elsewhere: ‘The soul is evil when it is thoroughly mixed with the body and shares its experiences and has all the same opinions’.²⁴

With a more diverse corpus, comprised of works ranging from literary essay to philosophical handbook, it is not surprising that the concept of *tolma* in Porphyry should be put to more varied uses beyond that of metaphysical declination as in Plotinus. His *Homeric Questions* include analysis of what the critic deemed poetic acts of daring on the part of Homer (for example, having Achilles’ horses speak).²⁵ In this usage, Porphyry was merely adopting a tag standard in rhetorical and literary criticism.²⁶ His treatise in defense of vegetarianism, on the other hand, invariably used *tolma* and its cognates to designate the acts of killing or eating animals (or humans), as well as the sophistical arguments raised in defense of such dietary practices.²⁷ While this context for *tolma* clearly contains a moral valence, it only partly exhibits the metaphysical daring that led to evil delineated in Plotinus.

If we consider the claims made in the second book of *On Abstinence* that animal sacrifice was performed at the behest of wicked demons, delighting in the smoky vapors of burning flesh and deceptively seeking the honours due the gods, we glimpse a picture more resonant with Plotinus’ description. The description of wicked demons, flitting about the sacrificial bodies on their own material (albeit invisible) ‘chariots’ and becoming recipients of honour through the reckless acts of animal slaughter,²⁸ does seem to embody an occurrence of the sort of *tolma* as evil that was presented in the *Enneads*. Elsewhere, in the *Philosophy from Oracles*, the attempt to discover the presence and nature of these wicked demons is explicitly described as the daring of human nature in looking into ‘the traps laid about it’.²⁹ The lengthy fragment from which this claim comes is dedicated to showing the strong link between demons and the material world.³⁰ The demons found pleasure not only in the bodies of sacrificial victims but also in the well-fed bodies of the humans who invoked them to ‘penetrate’ themselves in order to deliver oracles through the human medium. The fragment as a whole is resonant with the description of demons hovering about bodies in the *On Abstinence*, though its exploration of the actual penetration of demons into human bodies goes well beyond that treatise’s discussion.

A different expression of reckless concern with the embodied life was one that sought to escape the body prematurely. In his treatise *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, Porphyry interprets the Homeric episode of Odysseus’ blinding of Polyphemus’ eye as an allegory for an unsuccessful attempt at ending one’s sensible life: ‘It was not possible simply to be released from this sensible life by blinding it and hastening to abolish it in short order; but the wrath of the marine and material gods attended on the one daring this’.³¹ If the audacity of the *On Abstinence* and the *Philosophy from Oracles* consisted in undue attention to and enjoyment of bodily things, so also an opposite activity that inappropriately sought to shorten one’s bodily existence was equally deemed an act of morally perverse daring.

²³ Plot. *Enn.* 2.9.11.22–23. This is, it should be noted, directly contrary to the Gnostics’ own conception of Sophia’s upward-aiming *tolma*; see Atkinson (n.21) 5–6, citing earlier scholarship.

²⁴ *Enn.* 1.2.3.12–14 (tr. Armstrong).

²⁵ Porph. *Quaest.Hom.* 19.407 (H. Schrader, *Porphyrii Quaestionum Homericarum Reliquiae* (Leipzig 1890) 239.4–6); cf. *Quaest.Hom.* 9.1 (Schrader 129.19–21).

²⁶ *LSJ* s.v. *tolmēma*, 2; cf. Longin. 2.2.

²⁷ See *Abst.* 2.57.2, 3.20.7, 4.2.29, 4.5.39.

²⁸ *Abst.* 2.42.3, cf. 2.39.2; J. Bidez, *Vie de Porphyre* (Gand 1913) 89–90.

²⁹ Porph. *Phil.Orac. fr.* 326.38–39 Smith (n.9); cf. *fr.* 348.11–12 Smith (n.9) (= an oracle of Apollo).

³⁰ For the materiality of demons in late antique thought generally, see G. Smith, ‘How thin is a demon?’ *J ECS* 16 (2008) 479–512.

³¹ Porph. *de Antro nymph.* 35, p.80.11–13 Nauck (A. Nauck, *Porphyrius Philosophus Platonius. Opuscula Selecta* (Hildesheim 1977)).

A further instance of morally significant daring occurs in his *Letter to Anebo*, though here we lack sufficient material to gain a full picture of what Porphyry thought was involved in the recklessness. The darkness of ignorance about the divine ‘makes humanity full of all evils because of a lack of learning (*amathia*) and recklessness (*tolma*)’.³² The moral turpitude of *tolma* seen elsewhere is thus explicitly linked to a lack of religious and theological sensibility, in particular the correct knowledge of a theological hierarchy (gods are distinct and superior to demons) that paralleled an ontological hierarchy.³³

Placed within this broader range of possibilities of reckless behaviour, embracing both metaphysical and moral as well as religious ramifications, Fragment 39 of the *Against the Christians* may be seen as exhibiting a late Platonic (Plotinian) philosophical vision. The fact that Porphyry here employs *tolmēma* rather than *tolma* should emphasize further that his concern is with a particular act of Origen, since the former term seems to be limited to *acts* of daring, whereas the latter usually denotes a *trait* inherent in the agent (though it can secondarily designate acts as well).³⁴ Other than this, the comparable material just discussed opens up some interesting interpretive possibilities for the fragment’s mention of Origen’s daring deed. If the parallels with the passages from the *On Abstinence* and the *Philosophy from Oracles* are determinative, then Origen’s daring act may have been his inappropriate attention to things of the body, especially the doctrine of bodily resurrection,³⁵ or the honouring of a lesser being (Christ) who had been closely associated with the material levels of the ontological hierarchy.

In support of this latter point is the fact that Porphyry appears to have given some attention to the place of Jesus’ soul within his Platonizing ontological and theological hierarchy in the *Philosophy from Oracles*.³⁶ There he cites an oracle that declared Jesus to be a holy man whose soul had been elevated to the heavens after death. Christians had worshiped his soul out of ignorance.³⁷ Unlike these ignorant ones, whose souls would continue to occupy the lower material realms of Being, Christ’s pious soul ascended to a higher, less materially-compromised level. Elsewhere, Porphyry describes the descent of the soul as a progressive attachment to material ‘dough’, beginning with a pneumatic soul ‘chariot’ (already noted above in connection with demons) before being born into a physical body.³⁸ The ascent of a purified soul thus requires the sloughing off of these material agglomerations; the gradual ascent through the planetary spheres is only possible with the increased purification of the soul from all traces of the material world.

While other fragments from his *Philosophy from Oracles* are less flattering to Christ,³⁹ there does seem to be a greater propensity in Porphyry’s writings to attack Christians generally rather than their Teacher. Here, in particular, it was his followers who had misconstrued his nature as if it belonged to the highest divinity and so had fallen into what he would elsewhere name ‘fatal error’ in their doctrine

³² Porph. *Ep. Aneb.* 1, p.8.11–15 Sodano (n.13).

³³ The use of ‘daring’ in a theological sense occurs in Christian authors as well; see for example, Eus. *c. Marc.* 1.4[22].21, 2.1[33].8, 2.1[33].10, 2.1[34].12, 2.1[35].17; *Eccl. theol.* 1.5[63].1, 1.9[67].1, 1.12[71].1, 1.14[76].3–4.

³⁴ See *LSJ* ss.vv.

³⁵ *Phil. Orac. fr.* 344c Smith (n.9); *c. Christ. fr.* 92, 93 Harnack (n.1) (both anonymous). Porphyry’s doctrine of the soul, of course, necessitated the soul’s post-mortem escape from bodies; see for example, *Regr. anim. fr.* 297, 297a–d, 300 Smith (n.9); *Comm. Tim. fr.* 80 Sodano (n.13); F. Cumont, *Lux Perpetua* (New York and London 1987) 367–70; Bidez (n.28) 89; W. Deuse, *Untersuchungen zur mittelplatonischen und neuplatonischen Seelenlehre* (Wiesbaden 1983) 129–230. On Origen’s doctrine of bodily resurrection, see H. Chadwick, ‘Origen, Celsus and the resur-

rection of the body’, *HThR* 41 (1948) 83–102; L. Hennessey, ‘A philosophical issue in Origen’s eschatology’, in R.J. Daly (ed.), *Origeniana Quinta* (Leuven 1992) 373–80.

³⁶ See R.L. Wilken, ‘Pagan criticism of Christianity: Greek religion and Christian faith’, in W. Schoedel and R. Wilken (eds), *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition* (Paris 1979) 120–23.

³⁷ Porph. *Phil. Orac. fr.* 345 Smith (n.9).

³⁸ See especially *Comm. Tim. fr.* 80 Sodano (n.13); Cumont (n.35) 367–69; Bidez (n.28) 89; Deuse (n.35) 129–230, especially 218–29. For Origen’s notion of soul chariots, see H. Crouzel, ‘Le thème platonicien du “véhicule de l’âme” chez Origène’, *Didaskalia* 7 (1977) 225–38; H. Schibli, ‘Origen, Didymus and the vehicle of the soul’, in Daly (n.35) 381–91; Hennessey (n.35) 373–80.

³⁹ See *Phil. Orac. fr.* 343 Smith (n.9).

and cult.⁴⁰ There is a possibility, then, that Origen's act of daring consisted of the adoption of such an erroneous belief, which would perpetuate the ignorance of souls who were unduly attentive to only the lowest levels of the divine hierarchy. This suggestion, which emphasizes an intellectual and theological act, has the advantage of providing greater doctrinal specificity to Porphyry's criticism of Origen. A further fragment of Porphyry, which will receive closer attention in the next section of this article, confirms this interpretation of 'daring' as a theological act: in the *Against Nemertius*, Porphyry condemns Nemertius (who seems to hold Epicurean views regarding Providence) for having 'dared to blaspheme'.⁴¹ In this case, the blasphemy consisted of attributing evil or error to the divine mind.

A theological understanding of Origen's daring deed does not exhaust the interpretive possibilities. If the parallel with the passage from the *On the Cave of the Nymphs* (noted above) is deemed stronger than the passages just discussed, we might conclude that Origen's reckless act was one that sought to limit or destroy the binding effects of the body on the soul. For Porphyry, Odysseus' attack against Polyphemus signifies a soul's attack against its body. Origen's admiration of martyrs and exhortation to martyrdom embodies just this sort of daring.⁴²

Alternatively, his self-castration might prove an equally likely candidate for Origen's daring deed. The story of his emasculation was at least known to Eusebius.⁴³ If Porphyry had heard of Origen's self-castration, it is doubtful that it would have escaped his criticism of this leading Christian thinker.⁴⁴ In the *On Abstinence*, self-castration is deemed an act contrary to the laws previously followed, performed by 'certain uneducated (*idiōtōn*) men'.⁴⁵ The subsuming of such a violent act under the label of *tolmēma* in Fragment 39 would have carried the further metaphysical implications that Plotinus had paused over in *Enn.* 5.1.1, discussed above. Origen's act would have been considered as a reckless aloofness from his soul's divine source; even while attempting to escape the passions of the body, his inordinate (though hostile) concern with bodily matters had led him further into metaphysical abandonment and independence from his divine source.⁴⁶

Because of the limits of the fragment, we are left with insufficient evidence to determine whether Origen's daring was an intellectual act of misguided theology about bodies or an act performed on or by bodies. A theological daring resided in his belief in Jesus' incarnational status as a God-Man (*theanthrōpos*)⁴⁷ who accomplished his own bodily resurrection, or the consequent belief of his followers in the bodily resurrection. A moral daring resided in Origen's commendation of Christian suicide (i.e., martyrdom), as well as in his own violent self-castration. Both of these suggestions are quite plausible and complementary to a Neoplatonist conception of metaphysical and moral recklessness constitutive of the lowest ontological levels of multiplicity and materiality.

⁴⁰ *Phil.Orac. fr.* 345a.46–56 Smith (n.9).

⁴¹ *c.Nemert. fr.* 281 Smith (n.9).

⁴² See Digeser (n.3) 51–52. A contrary view might implicitly occur in Bidez's claim that Plotinus would have admired Christian martyrs, (n.28) 69. For broader discussion of voluntary martyrdom (and the reactions it provoked among Romans), see G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, 'Voluntary martyrdom in the early Church', in G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy* (Oxford 2006) 153–200. Of course, Porphyry himself had been chastened by Plotinus for his unhealthy desire to separate himself from his body; see Porph. *V.Plot.* 11.12–19; Plot. *Enn.* 1.9; cf. M.J. Edwards, 'Scenes from the later wanderings of Odysseus', *CQ* 38 (1988) 509–21, especially 516–19.

⁴³ See Eus. *HE* 6.8.1–3; for discussion of Origen's self-castration, see D. Caner, 'The practice and prohibition of self-castration in early Christianity', *VChr* 51 (1997) 396–415; C. Marksches, 'Kastration und Magenproblem? Einige neue Blicke auf das asketische

Leben des Origenes', in C. Marksches, *Origenes und seine Erbe: Gesammelte Studien* (Berlin 2007) 15–34.

⁴⁴ Indeed, self-castration was deemed a *tolmēma* by Demetrius of Alexandria (ap. Eus. *HE* 6.8.3, in reference to Origen) and by Origen himself (*Comm.Matth.* 15.3, GCS 40.354).

⁴⁵ Porph. *Abst.* 1.2.3; cf. *c.Christ. fr.* 37 Harnack (anonymous) (n.1). In a sexual context, daring denoted behaviour contrary to nature (*para phusin*) at Plato *Leg.* 1.636c.

⁴⁶ Though this is a form of reasoning quite similar to that evinced in Origen's case at *Ep.Marc.* 34.418–20 ('be ready to cut off the whole body for the sake of the soul'), it is doubtful that Porphyry intended this in any sort of literal way, given his statement from the *Abst.* (just cited) and his description of Plotinus' assuagement of his own melancholic condition at *V.Plot.* 11.12–19. God's providential activity is also described in terms of medical amputation at *c.Nemert. fr.* 279 Smith (n.9).

⁴⁷ See Origen *Princ.* 2.6.3.

II. Porphyry's laws and Origen's lawlessness

In close proximity to the passage from the *On Abstinence* which condemned those who castrated themselves, Castricius (the dedicatee of the treatise) was said to have despised 'the ancestral laws of philosophy' to which he had been committed when he returned to a meat diet.⁴⁸ It is precisely the legal nature of both Ammonius' and Origen's lifestyles that had formed a central element in Porphyry's presentation in Fragment 39. Just as Castricius and the castratees of the *On Abstinence* are described as variously adopting 'laws opposite to those under which they had previously lived', so Origen was said to have 'lived Christianly and contrary to the laws (*paranomōs*)'.

In one of the most important treatments of Fragment 39 to date, Marco Zambon persuasively argues that the laws in question are not the civic laws of the local *polis*, but are rather natural or divine laws.⁴⁹ The considerations above regarding the philosophical context for Porphyry's conception of *tolma/tolmēma* favour such an interpretation of the laws in this passage (whatever the precise nature of the daring act may have been). A philosophically critical assessment of Origen's daring deed resonates with a philosophical conception of law, which sought to rise above the multiplicity of localized civic laws and discover the universally-binding laws of the natural and divine orders.

Zambon's thesis can be confirmed further if we attend to some instances of *paranomia* elsewhere in Porphyry and other Platonic authors (particularly Plutarch and Iamblichus). A clear instance where 'lawlessness' does not, and indeed cannot, refer to a person's rejection of the cult activity that was commonly seen as sustaining civic order and prosperity occurs in his *Letter to Marcella*. Here, Porphyry rebukes those who combine moral carelessness with religious exuberance: one could not claim to love both God and bodies or wealth, for 'a lover of bodies is entirely a lover of wealth, and a lover of wealth is necessarily unjust, and an unjust person is so towards God, unholy to one's fathers and *paranomōs* towards others'.⁵⁰ Porphyry concludes that, though such a person sacrifices hecatombs and dedicates countless votives, he remains 'impious, atheistic and a temple-robber in way of life'.⁵¹ The passage is redolent of notions of philosophical or 'spiritual' sacrifice in Pythagorean, Platonist and Christian thought of the imperial period. As such it marks out 'lawlessness' in a less material and civic sense (though explicit rejection of the civic sphere would be postponed until later in the same letter; see below). Instead, the unlawful manner of the person in question was primarily exhibited in moral behaviour that failed to be informed by a Platonist (or Pythagorean) account of metaphysics and anthropology. One's lawlessness was thus predicated upon and embodied in those practices that pursued bodily pleasures and concerns. Yet, the parallel between Fragment 39 and this single instance of *paranomōs* in the *Letter to Marcella* is imprecise because of their different contexts and rhetorical purposes.

Another salient occurrence of *paranomia* in Porphyry's corpus is found in a work almost entirely neglected in modern scholarship. In the treatise *Against Nemertius*, Porphyry sought to defend the doctrine of divine providence against the sceptical stance of Nemertius who had, according to Porphyry, 'dared (*tolmēsas*) to become a teacher of justice to God, though when opened up, [his book] is found to be full of the greatest injustice'.⁵² Nemertius' theological position continues to be described as an act of 'daring' in the fragment concerning *paranomia*.

⁴⁸ *Abst.* 1.2.3 (G. Clark (tr.), *Porphyry of Tyre. On Abstinence from Killing Animals* (Ithaca 2000) with comments 122–23, n.9); Zambon (n.3) 562. Lawlessness could also be applied to sexual, as well as dietary, enjoyments that were deemed unnatural or inappropriate to the divine laws; see *Ep.Aneb.* 2, p.19.3 Sodano (n.13); *On the Styx fr.* 382.17 Smith (n.9). The latter fragment may be a paraphrase of material from Plutarch; see C. Helmig, 'Plutarch of Chaeronea and

Porphyry on transmigration', *CQ* 58 (2008) 250–55.

⁴⁹ Zambon (n.3) 553–63.

⁵⁰ *Ep.Marc.* 14.244–47 O'Brien Wicker (who translates *paranomōs* as 'immoral' here); the sentence is verbally almost entirely identical to *Pythag.Sent.* 110; see K. O'Brien Wicker, *Porphyry the Philosopher: To Marcella* (Atlanta 1987) 101.

⁵¹ *Ep.Marc.* 14.248–49 O'Brien Wicker (n.50).

⁵² *Porph. c.Nemert.* 278.2–4 Smith (n.9).

For while the protector of all things is a divine Mind, ordering and administering everything by an exceeding magnitude of wisdom and power and by an incomparable quality, many causes escape the notice of the human mind, since it exists for a short time, even if one should seem to be wise and a seeker of truth. And, even if one will allow that the difficulties [of discerning a providential account of the world] are insoluble (*dusereunēton*),⁵³ it is pious not to dare (*tolman*) to blaspheme, but rather to think and to say that things are well as they are; and [to say] that because [everything] is well, it has happened the way that it has. For, why would a Mind that is so great and of such a kind act contrary to [its own] law (*paranomōs*)?⁵⁴

The assumption that the human mind is capable of comprehending the divine Mind and, alternatively, the counter-assumption that no solution can be found to the difficulties raised by what might seem to be the absurdities of human life are both reckoned as exhibiting theological daring. The opposite position rests in the safety of piety and acknowledgment of human limits in comprehending the ineffable work of God. Most important for our present investigation is the clear use of *paranomōs* with reference to the working of the divine Mind. Such a Mind would not, for Porphyry, act contrary to its eternally consistent, ordered rationality. Its law is not so much prescriptive, as a civic law would certainly be, but rather descriptive of an incessantly rational activity. As such, the sense of *nomos* here as designating that which is ‘customary’ is clearly appropriate: the divine Mind would not act in a way uncustomary to its character.

At one remove, the rejection or distortion of that divine law by humans attempting to make theological claims could also be labeled *paranomia*. In an earlier generation, Plutarch had named *paranomos* what he deemed theologically incorrect material in the myth of Isis and Osiris. After retelling the myth in his own words, he explained that he had cut out the inappropriate elements, having no patience for ‘those who hold transgressive (*paranomous*) and barbarous opinions’.⁵⁵ We soon find that those elements judged barbarous were exhibited in the euhemeristic version maintained by native Egyptians.⁵⁶ For Plutarch, the myth had to be explained ‘in a holy and philosophic manner’ instead.⁵⁷ Hence, the act of *paranomia* here centred upon the misleading interpretation of narratives about the divine, however conventional those interpretations might be.⁵⁸ The lawfulness of interpretation must have resided, then, in a philosophical understanding of divinity and divine law.

The characterization of theological incorrectness as transgressive of divine law would be taken up even more forcefully by Porphyry’s younger contemporary and interlocutor Iamblichus. In an important discussion on the untranslatability of sacred names, he criticizes the Greeks for performing misleading acts of religious translation: the sacred names and prayers, ‘do not cease from being eternally altered because of the innovation and lawlessness (*paranomia*) of the

⁵³ Cf. *Ep.Aneb.* 1, p.3.8 Sodano (n.13); 2, p.28.12–14 Sodano (n.13); *Regr.anim. fr.* 302 Smith (n.9).

⁵⁴ Porph. *c.Nemert. fr.* 281.1–11 Smith (n.9) (= Cyril *c.Jul.* III 85, 629D12–632A11). Smith places a question mark before the fragment since Cyril only introduces it as ‘Porphyry said’, without clear ascription to the *c.Nemert.* It is quite likely, however, that the fragment derives from this work since it is explicitly named in material before and after it in Cyril’s text, and because it continues the thematic focus of the named fragments of the *c.Nemert.* (i.e., a defence of providence).

⁵⁵ Plut. *de Iside* 358e.

⁵⁶ Plut. *de Iside* 359d–360d; cf. P. Hardie, ‘Plutarch and the interpretation of myth’, *ANRW* 2.33.6 (1992) 4743–87; D. Richter, ‘Plutarch on Isis and Osiris: text, cult, and cultural appropriation’, *TAPhA* 131 (2001)

191–216. Porphyry also criticized Euhemerism, though for different reasons (and apparently only in some instances); see *fr.* 469 Smith (n.9).

⁵⁷ Plut. *de Iside* 355c.

⁵⁸ That the higher law discoverable by philosophy could be at odds with the conventional laws of cities and nations is made clear in a much later text, when Theodoret accuses Plato of ‘legislating illegally (*paranomōs enomothetēsēn*)’ in his homicide laws (at *Leg.* 9.867c–868e); see *Curatio* 9.55. Even closer to the time of Porphyry, Eusebius narrated that Licinius ‘dared to annul the ancient laws laid down well and wisely by the Romans, and introduce laws that were barbarous and savage – laws (*nomoi*) which were most truly unlawful (*anomous*) and contrary to custom (*paranomous*)’, *Eus. HE* 10.8.12; cf. *VC* 1.55.1.

Greeks. The Greeks are by nature innovators...'.⁵⁹ This lawless activity is, of course, exactly opposite to that targeted by Plutarch, who had attempted to translate the Egyptian myth into a Greek philosophical idiom in order to escape the native *paranomia*. Iamblichus, on the other hand, criticized just such acts of Greek translation as fundamentally *paranoma*.

Strikingly, a theological application of the concept is elsewhere made by Iamblichus in criticism of Porphyry himself. Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo* had shown a 'fearful lawlessness (*paranomia*) toward all theology and theurgic activity', and raised points about the nature of demons deemed 'strange' (*atopos*) by Iamblichus.⁶⁰

The theological conception of *paranomia* in his *Against Nemertius*, as well as the material from Plutarch and Iamblichus, is consistent with the firm reservations about the importance of civic law for the philosopher that arise in the *On Abstinence*.⁶¹ His defence of vegetarianism dismisses civic concerns as below the sublime purview of the philosopher, for the city is concerned only with externals not with the highest aims of the soul.⁶² Even as he claims not to destroy the laws of cities and nations,⁶³ he nonetheless flatly rejects laws and customs that sanction animal sacrifice in an attempt to recall the philosopher to the ancient laws of a wiser and more pious age which prescribed abstinence from eating meat. The contemporary practices allowing, legitimizing and even fostering the eating of meat were nothing short of *paranomia*, in spite of their civic or ethnic legal status.⁶⁴ The written laws for the many were to be transcended by the philosopher who sought the unwritten divine laws.⁶⁵ Such expressions recall his discussion of the civic virtues in the *Sentences*, which, while not being rejected, were deemed of little import within the hierarchy of virtues that are mapped onto the Neoplatonic ontological and theological hierarchical conception.⁶⁶ Even more clearly, the *Letter to Marcella* rejects civic law as appropriate for the unphilosophical souls of the masses in favour of the natural and especially divine laws followed by the philosopher.⁶⁷ Civic laws are laid down by convention (*thetos*) only for a particular time (*kairos*),⁶⁸ and are implemented by the force (*to biaion*) of worldly rulers.⁶⁹ The divine law, on the contrary, is deemed to be stronger than any force.⁷⁰ If one grasps the law of nature and then moves on to the divine law, one has no need of the civic law.⁷¹

⁵⁹ Iamb. *Myst.* 7.5 (259.6–8 Parthey (G. Parthey, *Iamblichi de Mysteriis* (Berlin 1857)); cf. G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes* (Princeton 1993) 131–41; D. Frankfurter, 'The consequences of hellenism in late antique Egypt: religious worlds and actors', *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 2 (2000) 162–94.

⁶⁰ Iamb. 3.22 (152.9–14 Parthey (n.59)); note the combination of *paranomia* and *atopia* in Fragment 39.

⁶¹ This point is suggested, though not fully explored, in Zambon (n.3) 561–62.

⁶² *Abst.* 2.43.2.

⁶³ *Abst.* 2.33.1.

⁶⁴ *Abst.* 2.7.2–3, cf. 2.28.3, 3.18.5. Even if some of this material is derived from Theophrastus or Plutarch (on which, see J. Bouffartigue and M. Patillon, *Porphyre. De l'abstinence. Livres II–III* (Paris 1979) 17–29, especially 20–21, also 144–45; Clark (n.48) 147, n.225), it is cited favourably, and paraphrased and extended in such a way as to make it nearly impossible to determine what might be distinctively Theophrastean and what Porphyrian.

⁶⁵ *Abst.* 1.28.4, cf. 2.3.2.

⁶⁶ *Sent.* 32, with discussion by L. Brisson, 'The doctrine of the degrees of virtues in the Neoplatonists: an analysis of Porphyry's *Sentence* 32, its antecedents, and its heritage', in H. Tarrant and D. Baltzly (eds),

Reading Plato in Antiquity (London 2006) 89–105. D.J. O'Meara (*Platonopolis* (Oxford 2003) 44–46) unduly emphasizes the political virtues in his assessment of Porphyry's position.

⁶⁷ *Ep.Marc.* 25.384–27.438.

⁶⁸ In his application of *kairos* to civic laws, Porphyry provides an oblique criticism of Aristotle's claim of the civic sphere's superiority over the more local (for example the deme) since the advantage of the former was for all of life whereas the advantage of the latter was only 'for a moment'; see Arist. *EN* 8.9.1160a21–28.

⁶⁹ *Ep.Marc.* 25.397–400.

⁷⁰ *Ep.Marc.* 26.408–09.

⁷¹ *Ep.Marc.* 27.420–23. In spite of such sentiments, one might be tempted to see Fragment 39's *paranomia* as consisting of a rejection of the Jewish Law, which would collapse distinctions of divine and civic/ethnic laws. While Porphyry was consistently favourable toward the Jews, there is simply insufficient evidence that Porphyry here was equating the Jewish Law with the divine law or referring to the Jewish Law at all. *Paranomia* and its cognates in Hellenistic, Jewish and early Christian authors could convey precisely this conception, i.e., the breaking of the Mosaic Law, or generally sinfulness or the rejection of God; cf., for

Porphyry's conception, then, is not to be confused with the sort of Stoic account of natural and civic law, which had been expressed most notably by Cicero and other philosophers.⁷² The Stoic assumption of an analogous relationship between the natural and civic spheres is not resonant with Porphyry's Platonic system in any straightforward way – in spite of the fact that one might otherwise consider it readily amenable to a Platonic emanationist schema.⁷³ This complication arises from a consistent emphasis upon the soul's moral and ontological status in the material world. Though Plotinus had argued against the Gnostics for the absence of moral evil in the Soul's demiurgic activity, the world remained – for both Plotinus and Porphyry – a place of moral and philosophical confusion for a soul on sojourn in a foreign country, far from its source in the One, the Good.⁷⁴ As such, all body was to be escaped,⁷⁵ and one's bodily, civic and ethnic affiliations could be seen as (at least potentially) compromising the philosophic task of salvation.

Those who would see the *Against the Christians* as seeking to legitimize the persecution of Christians as offenders against the laws of city and empire, whether during the reigns of Aurelian or Diocletian,⁷⁶ must face the incongruity of an interpretation of the laws of Fragment 39 in a civic sense with this consistently ambivalent, even negative, stance to the civic sphere in his other writings.⁷⁷ Our consideration of *paranomia* here, combined with the observations regarding *tolmēma* above, lends plausibility to the interpretation of Porphyry's criticism of Christians as targeting a perceived rejection of the divine law: it was apostasy from a higher unwritten law, not the laws of state, which Porphyry most likely identified as the salient transgression of the Christians. Because so little of Porphyry's criticism of Origen survives, it remains impossible to make a precise determination of the elements of the divine law that would have been neglected by Christians. Again, however, the candidates for 'recklessness' noted above seem most plausible: (a) the doctrine of the incarnation and bodily resurrection of Jesus, as well as the bodily resurrection of his followers, would have represented a clear confusion over the natural law about souls and the divine law that would have called souls back to their divine origin; (b) the inappropriate focus of worship upon Jesus, however holy he may have been, myopically neglected all of the higher levels of the theological hierarchy; (c) the legitimation of martyrdom by Origen; or (d) the moral logic behind his self-castration would equally have been judged a blatant form of disregard for the divine laws of providence at work in the world.

There is a certain irony in the fact that the very work in which Origen the Christian was criticized for living contrary to the laws would itself be condemned for its unlawful character. Constantine would designate the *Against the Christians* as 'unlawful compositions (*suntagmata atta paranoma*)'.⁷⁸ In this, significantly, he was only continuing Plutarch's and Porphyry's conception of *paranomia* as a theological error, which he then made a matter of imperial law.

example, Origen *Expos. Prov.* PG 17, p.236.38–39, 249.17; Eus. *DE* 1.7.2, 8.2.103; *Comm.Isa.* 1.81; *Comm.Psalm.* 23.1249.35, *passim*. See also, Julian *Ep.* 111, Bidez–Cumont (J. Bidez and F. Cumont, *Imp. Caesaris Flavii Claudii Iuliani epistulae, leges, poemata, fragmenta varia* (Paris 1922)) 432d (which may be an echo of Fragment 39).

⁷² See, for example, E. Asmis, 'Cicero on natural law and the laws of state', *ClAnt.* 27 (2008) 1–33.

⁷³ For such an emanationist schema, see Zambon (n.3) 558–59 (though see 561–62).

⁷⁴ See *Abst.* 1.30.2–4, 1.33.5; G. Clark, 'Translate into Greek: Porphyry of Tyre on the new barbarians', in R. Miles (ed.), *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity* (London and New York 1999) 112–32.

⁷⁵ See *Regr.anim. fr.*: 297, 297a–d, 300 Smith (n.9).

⁷⁶ For a date under Aurelian, see Bidez (n.28) 65–70; A. Cameron, 'The date of Porphyry's KATA ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΩΝ', *CQ* 17 (1967) 382–84. For a date under Diocletian, which has become increasingly popular, see especially T.D. Barnes, 'Scholarship or propaganda? Porphyry *Against the Christians* and its historical setting', *BICS* 39 (1994) 53–65; P.F. Beatrice, 'Antistes philosophiae: ein Christenfeindlicher Propagandist am Hofe Diokletians nach dem Zeugnis des Laktanz', *Augustinianum* 33 (1993) 31–47; Digeser (n.3); Wilken (n.36).

⁷⁷ This point is gestured at by Bidez (n.28) 67–68, 76–78.

⁷⁸ *Const. Ep. ad episc.* ap. Soc. *HE* 1.9 (= Test.9 Harnack (n.1)).

III. Origen's Hellenizing and Porphyry's Hellenicity

One of the most persistent features of modern treatments of Porphyry is the close connection claimed to exist between the philosopher and Greek cultural heritage. An almost entirely unchallenged characterization of Porphyry in the last century of scholarship identifies him as a 'defender of Hellenism' (though what the term Hellenism might mean more precisely is often not pursued).⁷⁹ An exhaustive analysis of all references to Greeks in Porphyry's corpus, however, reveals a rather ambivalent, even negative, attitude toward the Greeks. Investigation of the relevant material scattered throughout his corpus is of great importance for our interpretation of Fragment 39, since Origen's Greek affiliations are central to Porphyry's description of him.

Because I have elsewhere offered an extensive analysis of Porphyry's attitude toward the Greeks and, in particular, the extent to which we might speak of his Hellenicity, or self-ascribed Greek identity, the conclusions of that research will only be sketched briefly here.⁸⁰

(1) Only rarely are the Greeks spoken of in clearly positive terms: clear expressions of a favourable view of the Greeks are limited to three passages, and, in at least two of these, reference is made only to a narrowly circumscribed part of the Greek collectivity.⁸¹

(2) Other instances are more ambivalent: the *On Abstinence*, which places the Greeks first in a series of nations which had enjoined vegetarianism since they were 'most fitting',⁸² offers a narrative of decline from earlier abstinence from meat-eating to a meat diet, accompanied by wars, violence and moral depravity.⁸³ After delineating the virtuous and philosophically sound dietary regimens of a number of eastern nations,⁸⁴ Porphyry dismisses the Greek sophistical complaints about the difficulty of such austere practices.⁸⁵

(3) Some references to the Greeks are explicitly negative: the preface to the *Letter to Anebo* remarks on the discordant state of affairs among Greek philosophers because of their constant recourse to conjecture, hence the need to consult an Egyptian priest on theological matters.⁸⁶ More striking is the occurrence of a claim in the *Philosophy from Oracles* that numerous Eastern nations had found the road to the gods, but the Greeks had been led astray.⁸⁷ Furthermore, Greeks were the opponents who sought to undermine Plotinus' credibility as an original philosopher in the *Life of Plotinus*.⁸⁸

(4) The formula 'Greeks and barbarians' does not emphasize a distinction between cultural superiority and inferiority in Porphyry, but has become a generic tag for 'everyone in the world'.⁸⁹ While 'barbarian' may still convey the sense of 'savage' or 'uncultured', it does so in only a limited number of occasions (most notably Fragment 39, an instance to which we shall return in the final section); otherwise, it merely means 'foreign,' without any negative connotations.⁹⁰

⁷⁹ For the epithet, see Bidez (n.28) 6, 118, 129, 131.

⁸⁰ See A.P. Johnson, 'Porphyry's Hellenism', in S. Morlet (ed.), *Le traité de Porphyre contre les chrétiens* (Paris 2011) 165–81; A.P. Johnson, *Religion and Identity in Porphyry of Tyre* (Cambridge forthcoming).

⁸¹ *Comm.Tim.* 2.28 Sodano (n.13) (the 'most theological among the Greeks' are most likely Orphic devotees); *de simulac.* 354 Smith (n.9) ('wisdom of the Greeks' designates Orphic thought); *Ep.Marc.* 4.58–59 (he travelled because of the 'need of the Greeks', which can no longer be taken as an allusion to assisting pagan emperors against Christianity; see K. Alt, 'Porphyrios als Helfer in griechischen Nöten. Brief an Markella Kap. 4', in R. Faber and B. Seidensticker (eds), *Worte, Bilder, Töne. Studien zur Antike und Antikerezeption* (Würzburg 1996) 201–10.

⁸² *Abst.* 4.2.1. Most translators have decided to render the adjective as 'most familiar' and have added 'to us'. The 'to us' is not in the Greek text and need not be taken as implied by Porphyry. Whatever the case

may be, it is unclear precisely what Porphyry meant the adjective to entail.

⁸³ *Abst.* 4.2.1–9; the decline was only offset in Lacedaemon by Lyncurgus, who was able to institute ordered eating habits, though without ever restoring a meatless diet (4.3–5). For Porphyry's sources, see M. Patillon and A. P. Segonds, *Porphyre. De l'abstinence. Livre IV* (Paris 1995) xi–xix.

⁸⁴ Egyptians: *Abst.* 4.6–10, Jews: 4.11–14, Persians: 4.16, Indians: 4.17.1–4.18.5; for further discussion, see A.P. Johnson (n.80) (forthcoming).

⁸⁵ *Abst.* 4.18.4.

⁸⁶ *Ep.Aneb.* 1, p.2.12–14, 2, p.29.19–20 Sodano (n.13).

⁸⁷ *Phil.Orac. fr.* 324 Smith (n.9).

⁸⁸ *V.Plot.* 17.1–2.

⁸⁹ See, for example, *Abst.* 3.3.3, 4.5.5; *c.Christ. fr.* 69 Harnack (n.1) (= Macarius).

⁹⁰ See, for example, *Abst.* 1.13.5, 3.18.4; *V.Pythag.* 14, 19.

His treatment of the Greeks, as of any other nation, was marked by a nuanced evaluation of positive and negative features of their communal way of life and distinctive doctrines. Hellenocentrism, as well as any other expression of a cultural or ethnic centrism, was to be eschewed by the philosophic soul longing for return to its true homeland.⁹¹ Such a position regarding ethnic affiliation aligns itself well with the conception of civic, natural and divine laws observed above: just as civic law was deemed a part of the embodied condition that was to be transcended by the philosopher, so civic and ethnic identities were to be transcended as well.

Fragment 39 of the *Against the Christians* must be situated within this wide-ranging refusal to espouse a Greek or other identity. While Origen is described as having committed an act of ‘barbarian daring’ (a negative point) though he was ‘a Greek trained in Greek *logoi*’ (a positive point), the fragment is not a straightforward defence of Hellenism (or Hellenicity) against the barbarianizing tendencies of Christianity. It would seem rather that Origen’s Greek identity and training are made conspicuous in order to support the credibility of Porphyry’s claim that Origen ‘Hellenized’ when he read the Jewish scriptures.

Two features of the passage are noteworthy. First, while Ammonius has a ‘conversion’, he is never said to convert to Hellenism as such, nor is any mention of his cultural affiliations or ethnic background ever hinted at – only his religious, and then philosophical, positions; hence, the admirable conversion of Ammonius did not have Greek identity as its object. Second, Origen is never specifically said to have rejected his Greek identity, in spite of his act of ‘barbarian recklessness’. Instead, the centre of Porphyry’s complaint is that Origen inappropriately maintained his Hellenicity by Hellenizing in his doctrine, even though he ‘lived Christianly’ in his lifestyle. As remarked earlier, there is no clear conversion in Porphyry’s description of Origen (if we understand conversion as a distinct turn from one set of beliefs and behaviour to another, on the model of Ammonius who ‘immediately converted’, *euthus ... metebaletō*). We are only told that Origen did not adopt the correct way of life of his teacher, but instead took a different path from him; Origen’s lifestyle did not correspond, in Porphyry’s mind, to what was taught by his teacher. The fragment does not claim that Origen at one time lived the correct lifestyle, but then rejected it – only that he never practised Ammonius’ lifestyle in accordance with the (natural and divine) laws. At some point, such failure to imitate Ammonius led to an act of daring.

We should probably not be so surprised at Origen’s recalcitrance in following the teacher, since recent scholarship has made clear that ancient schools were rather fluid gatherings.⁹² A classroom may have been in a public portico or park, as easily as in a room of a private house. A student was never formally enrolled, and while some may have been deeply devoted to their teachers and formed an inner core of disciples, others may have attended the lectures or seminars less regularly and with less commitment. Even if we suppose that the Origen of Fragment 39 is the same person mentioned as a serious student of Ammonius by Longinus and Porphyry in the *Life of Plotinus*,⁹³ there is no reason to believe that such a serious student felt compelled to adopt entirely the lifestyle of the master (as becomes clear from consideration of the religious life of Amelius, who was designated ‘a lover of sacrifices’, *philothutos*, in contrast to Plotinus’ aloofness from such practices).⁹⁴ Some such dissonance was perceived to exist between Ammonius’ and Origen’s lifestyles in the fragment of the *Against the Christians*.⁹⁵

⁹¹ See *Ep. Marc.* 6.99–114; *Abst.* 1.30.2–4, 1.33.5; Clark (n.74) 112–32.

⁹² See J. Dillon, ‘Philosophy as a profession in late antiquity’, in S. Swain and M. Edwards (eds), *Approaching Late Antiquity* (Oxford 2004) 401–18; E. Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria* (Berkeley 2006).

⁹³ *V. Plot.* 20.36–37. On the vexed issue of whether

there was one or two Origen’s (a pagan and a Christian), see variously, Goulet (n.3); P.F. Beatrice, ‘Porphyry’s judgment on Origen’, in R.J. Daly (n.35) 351–67; M. Zambon, ‘Porfirio e Origene uno *status quaestionis*’, in S. Morlet (ed.), *Le traité de Porphyre contre les chrétiens* (Paris 2011) 107–64.

⁹⁴ *V. Plot.* 10.33–39.

⁹⁵ See Digeser (n.3) 36–57, especially 52–55.

Though Ammonius converts from being ‘a Christian with Christian parents’ (that is, he rejects this previous identity), Porphyry represents Origen as lacking such a conversion and persisting in his Greekness. We inappropriately confuse the issue if we presume that ‘Greek’ means ‘pagan’ for Porphyry. While religious elements could certainly be constitutive of Greek identity, other elements were frequently just as or more salient in his formulations of Greekness. In Fragment 39, Origen’s being a Greek raised in Greek *logoi* does not entail that Origen was originally a pagan.⁹⁶ Origen was a Greek and we are never told that he stopped being Greek – even though he committed an act of ‘barbarian’ daring. Furthermore, this daring act most likely was not the acceptance of Jewish texts or teachings, but, as already discussed, a theological act of blasphemy or an act exhibiting inordinate concern over bodies, or a moral indiscretion related to bodies. Porphyry’s complaint about Christians in the first part of Fragment 39 was not so much that they adopted the Jewish scriptures (a practice Porphyry himself performs elsewhere in his corpus),⁹⁷ but that, instead of defending them on their own terms (making an *apologia* for them), they used the opportunity to praise their own ideas.⁹⁸ Origen similarly avoided what Porphyry thought was the clear meaning of the biblical texts and in their place ‘substituted’ Greek doctrine such as might be found in the mysteries, doing so by continually drawing on the writings of a number of Greek (or, at least, Hellenophone) philosophical authors. Thus, Hellenizing is not a process Porphyry defends, but rather a cause for complaint. Origen’s Hellenizing, which stifled the native teachings of Jewish texts by inappropriately inserting Greek ones in their place, exhibited an interpretive error worthy of full censure. Porphyry’s characterization of Origen’s interpretive technique as one of ‘substitution’ of a set of ideas external to the text, in place of those ideas deemed to be inherent in the text, recalls an important passage from Plato, to which we must now turn.

IV. Origen as adoptive father

In the middle voice (as it occurs in our fragment), the verb *hupoballein* can convey the sense of adopting children or of becoming a surrogate parent.⁹⁹ A classic instance of such usage in a philosophical context is Plato *Republic* 7.538a, where Socrates speaks of a child who finds out when he has grown up that his parents are only surrogate parents. This entire passage of the *Republic* is quite similar to Porphyry’s description of Origen’s reading activity. Elucidation of the parallels between the two passages deepens our appreciation of the philosophical nature of Porphyry’s criticisms of Origen. Indeed, it seems likely that Porphyry intentionally modelled his description on Plato’s text.

In the context of selecting out guardians for ever higher levels of education, Socrates claims that dialectic must be the tool of the highest level of education, but that its current practice is filled with *paranomia*.¹⁰⁰ From childhood, Socrates asserts, there are certain doctrines about justice and goodness, ‘in which we are brought up, as if under our parents’.¹⁰¹ Though the souls of moderate people will withstand temptations to abandon their ‘ancestral doctrines (*ta patria*)’,¹⁰² a sophist’s persistence in raising difficulties may shake a person’s convictions and

⁹⁶ This point has been rightly emphasized by Beatrice (n.93) 353; Edwards (n.17) 173 (Porphyry’s ‘desire for antithesis thus requires him [somewhat illogically] to contrast the Christian *parentage* of Ammonius with the pagan *education* of his pupil’ – the point remains salutary, even if it need not be pagan education, but rather a Greek ethnicity, that is at issue in Porphyry’s text). This is not to say that Eusebius does not take Porphyry’s claim to refer to a non-Christian period of Origen’s life; see *HE* 6.19.10.

⁹⁷ See *Antro nymph.* 10, p.63.10–13 Nauck (n.31);

Ad Gaurum 11.1–2, p.48.15 Kalbfleisch (I am grateful to Bob Lamberton for calling my attention to this text).

⁹⁸ This is precisely the complaint made against the Pythagorean Cronius; see Porph. *On the Styx fr.* 372 Smith (n.9). Likewise, Plutarch had earlier complained about those who dragged Jewish elements into the myth of Trypho; see *de Iside* 363D.

⁹⁹ *LSJ* s.v.

¹⁰⁰ *Pl. Rep.* 7.537e4, 539a3.

¹⁰¹ *Pl. Rep.* 7.538c6–7.

¹⁰² *Pl. Rep.* 7.538d1–4.

lead them to dishonour the traditional teachings. The person will then be open to adopting whatever way of life is most seductive.¹⁰³ ‘It seems that they have been turned from law-abiding (*nomimou*) to lawless (*paranomos*)’.¹⁰⁴

The problem of the sophistical employment of arguments (*logoi*) in disrupting established teaching is presented in a simile: it is like an adoptive child (*tis hupobolimaios*) growing up under surrogate parents (*hupobalomenous*). As long as he does not know of his adoption (*hupobolēs*), he will obey his foster parents and be disinclined to ‘do or say any lawless thing (*ti paranomon*) to them’.¹⁰⁵ But, when he has grown up and realizes that his parents are only foster parents, he is led by sophistical arguments to reject the notions of the good and the just under which he has grown up.¹⁰⁶ Hence, the introduction of the true dialectic espoused by Socrates must be done cautiously so as to avoid causing lawlessness: ‘you must be careful in what manner you introduce them to arguments (*tōn logōn*)’.¹⁰⁷ True dialectic had been heralded earlier as leading the eye of the soul out of ‘the barbaric mud’ (*borboros barbarikos*) in which it had sunk.¹⁰⁸ It was in the sophistical misuse of arguments (*logoi*) by those who enjoyed contradicting (*antilogia*) others for sport that philosophy had been brought into disrepute.¹⁰⁹

Plato’s portrayal of the dangers of seductive sophistry provides a number of parallels to Porphyry’s description of Origen. He had been raised with Greek *logoi*, but in contrast to the law-abiding way of life of his teacher in *logoi*, he persisted in living contrary to the laws. His use of *logoi* had led to an act of ‘barbarian recklessness’, contrary to what Plato had declared would be the result of correct dialectical use of *logoi*, namely the clearing of the soul’s eye from ‘barbaric mud’. The parallel employment of the notion of adoption or substitution is less exact: while Plato’s foster child had been adopted by parents and trained in their way of life, Origen brought Greek foster children (i.e. teachings) into a Jewish scriptural context. The doctrines of the Greeks were speciously adopted in place of the foreign doctrines clearly presented in the foreign texts.

It was not unusual to apply the language of adoption to a literary context. Critics of Plotinus were reported to have accused the philosophical master of plagiarizing from Numenius.¹¹⁰ Amelius, the fellow-student of Porphyry who would eventually leave Rome to reside in Numenius’ hometown of Apamea, wrote a book against the charge of plagiarism since, after all, he had allegedly memorized most of Numenius’ writings. In the epistolary preface to that work, quoted by Porphyry, Amelius identifies the criticism of Plotinus as being a ‘foster father’ (*hupobolimaios*) of Numenius’ ideas and, even worse, that he had ‘adopted’ (*hupobalomenos*) only the basest elements of reality in his philosophy.¹¹¹ Those who levelled the charge of plagiarism against Plotinus were, to Amelius’ mind, merely sophists who enjoyed ostentatious exhibitions of their eloquence and quickness of tongue.¹¹² Plotinus, on the other hand, was free from such ‘sophistical stage-shows and hot air’, as Porphyry would be sure to add.¹¹³ Some of the key features of Plato’s treatment (sophistry and adoption) are thus present in this conflict over literary paternity in the *Life of Plotinus*; even more elements are shared between Plato and Fragment 39.

The basic elements of *logoi*, parental upbringing, education, *paranomia*, substitution/adoption and barbaric error (whether describing ‘mud’ or ‘recklessness’) are all present in the passages of both Plato and Porphyry. And, while the precise configuration in each represents differing

¹⁰³ Pl. *Rep.* 7.536d6–539a1.

¹⁰⁴ Pl. *Rep.* 7.539a3 (*paranomos* should here be taken in an ethnic or civic sense).

¹⁰⁵ Pl. *Rep.* 7.538a9–b5.

¹⁰⁶ Pl. *Rep.* 7.538b7–c3.

¹⁰⁷ Pl. *Rep.* 7.539a8–9.

¹⁰⁸ Pl. *Rep.* 7.533d1.

¹⁰⁹ Pl. *Rep.* 7.539b1–d1.

¹¹⁰ Porph. *V.Plot.* 17.

¹¹¹ Porph. *V.Plot.* 17.23–24; cf. Porphyry’s own words (17.1–2, 18.3–4) and his paraphrase of Longinus (21.5–6).

¹¹² Porph. *V.Plot.* 17.20–22.

¹¹³ Porph. *V.Plot.* 18.6–7; on the ‘hot air’ (*typhon*) of this passage, see Zambon (n.3) 555.

historical and literary contexts, the rhetorical thrust is the same: just as Plato opposed the sophistical misappropriation of *logoi*, Porphyry, too, blamed Origen's interpretive activities as a misuse of the *logoi* he had received from his teacher. Fragment 39 is centred upon issues of a proper philosophical education, the reading of texts in a properly philosophical manner and the dangers of learning *logoi* when young as making one susceptible to sophistry.¹¹⁴ Even if not explicitly stated in the fragment as we have it (and of course, it would be the sort of thing Eusebius would want to omit from his selection of quotable material), Porphyry's primary complaint against Origen was that he was not a true philosopher but a sophist.

Together with our inquiry into the other key elements of Porphyry's representation of Origen, consideration of his complaint about 'substitution' or 'adoption' prompts an appreciation of the distinctive and philosophically serious nature of his objections to Christians in general and Origen in particular. Fragment 39 is neither a defence of the civic laws of empire nor a championing of Hellenism (understood as a Greek-centred identity). We have only been able to suggest more plausible objects of his criticism of Origen: the doctrine of bodily resurrection, the inappropriate cult to the demonic soul of Christ, the endorsement of Christian martyrdom or the legitimation and performance of self-castration. These possibilities fit more squarely within the philosophical framework of later Platonism, even if they lend themselves less readily to the Hellenocentric or imperialist cultural criticism of Christianity as a barbarian way of life. Indeed, it is highly unlikely that Porphyry would have adopted a self-consciously Hellenocentric approach to any set of doctrines or alternative modes of life. This is a striking, but more sensible and sustainable conclusion about a philosopher once deemed the great 'apologist of Hellenism'.

¹¹⁴ See Schott (n.3) 260–71; Zambon (n.3) 554–57, who cites Pl. *Protag.* 313cd; *Soph.* 223d, though not the *Rep.*