The Goddess Athena as Symbol of *Phronesis* in Porphyry’s *On the Cave of the Nymphs*

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**Abstract**

*On the Cave of the Nymphs*, an allegorical exegesis of Homer’s description of the cave of the nymphs at *Odyssey* 13.102-112, a passage quoted in full at the beginning of the treatise after the briefest possible indication of the project on which Porphyry is embarking, has been generally given little attention in discussions of Neoplatonic philosophy, as it is deemed to be of little importance for establishing Porphyrian doctrine. However, the treatise contains significant philosophical thoughts on the relationship between the soul and body, embodiment, demonology, and the concept of salvation of soul, which are compatible with his other works, especially *On Abstinence from Killing Animals* (*De Abstinentia*) and *Pathways to the Intelligible* (*Sententiae*). The concept of salvation of soul is found in Porphyry’s identification of the goddess Athena with *phronesis*, along with the olive tree, while Odysseus represents the soul descending into genesis, but will return back to his fatherland.

In this context, this paper will explore the role and meaning of *phronesis*, namely the goddess Athena, in the process of the soul’s journey towards the intelligible realm and show the relevance of the Neoplatonic doctrine of virtues, particularly the cathartic virtues, in *Sententiae* 32 to Porphyry’s reading of Homer’s image of Odysseus under guidance of the goddess Athena. *Phronesis* inspires the soul to incline towards the level of Intellect that is, away from damaging influences of the body to which the soul is enslaved and which confuses it with desires, passions, fears and illusory impressions, and prevents it from attaining the intelligible realm, whereas the body and its desires

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lead us to conflict and unjust behaviour in order to gain wealth, status, power, and pleasure.

**Keywords**


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**I**

In *Odyssey* 13.102-112 Homer depicts the cave of the Naiad Nymphs near the harbour of Phorcys in Ithaca where Odysseus is dropped by the Phaeacians and in which, under the guidance of the goddess Athena, he stores the Phaeacians’ valuable gifts. Following Numenius, in his treatise *On the Cave of the Nymphs* (hereafter *De Antro Nauck*), Porphyry analyses these lines and provides a setting for an allegorical interpretation of the *Odyssey* as a narrative of the cyclical journey of the human soul. The *Odyssey* as a whole, in which is narrated Odysseus’ laborious journey back to Ithaca and his escape from dangers, pleasures and other distractions along the way, symbolises the successful journey of the human soul to return to its ‘fatherland’, the realm of the intelligible. The hero transforms from a sinner due to his blinding of Polyphemus to a soul illuminated by the goddess Athena.¹ The *Odyssey* is deemed to be a spiritual journey by Plotinus and his circle, as in the case of Numenius and his school. The Delphic oracle revealing the fate of Plotinus’ soul after his death and quoted by Porphyry in his *Life of Plotinus* (*VPlot* 22.13-63) reflects Homeric echoes similar to the theme of *De Antro*.² The oracle enigmatically pronounces that Plotinus had managed to ‘escape from the bitter wave of blood-feeding life’ (πικρὸν κῦμ’ ἐξυπαλύξαι αἱμοβότου βιότοιο, 22.31-32; cf. 23.6), that is to say, from life entrapped in the body, just like Porphyry’s interpretation of Odysseus in *De Antro*, and his soul escaping from all toils of the material world. Furthermore, Plotinus in *Enneads* 1.6.8 interprets the journey of Odysseus,³ who flees from the pleasures

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¹ M. Edwards (1988) 520-1 for Porphyry’s division of the history of Odysseus. See R. Lamberton (1986) 130-1 for a discussion about the possible connection between the blinding of Polyphemus, which is a metaphor of suicide and Porphyry’s intention of suicide (*VPlot* 11).
offered by Circe and Calypso and eventually reaches his homeland, symbolising the successful journey of the human soul to return to the ‘fatherland’ that is the realm of the intelligible, while contrasting him with Narcissus, who loses himself in his own reflection in the water and ‘drowns in material beauty.’ We also find in Maximus of Tyre, a Platonist of the second century CE, an image of Odysseus as a model of the useful life and complete virtue; according to Maximus, it is virtue (ἀρητή) that makes the hero divine and like the immortals as Plato deems the happy man to be (τούτῳ ἄνδρᾳ ποιεῖ διογενῆ καὶ θεοίς εἰκελον, οἷον ἄξιοΙ Πλάτων εἶναι τὸν εὐδαιμόνα).

The core message of De Antro lies in Porphyry’s interpretation of Homer’s image of Odysseus and Athena sitting under the olive tree and Odysseus’ being stripped of his garments (De Antro 34, 35.10-17). Indeed, Porphyry identifies the goddess Athena with ‘practical wisdom’ (φρόνησις, De Antro 32.12), along with the olive tree, which Homer places near the cave in Odyssey 13.102, symbolising nous, the intellect that generates the cosmos and permeates it:

(32.8-33.3) ἐπεὶ γὰρ ὁ κόσμος οὐκ εἰκή οὐδ’ ώς ἔτυχε γέγονεν, ἀλλ’ ἐστὶ φρονήσεως θεοῦ καὶ νοερᾶς φύσεως ἀπότελεσμα, παραπεφύτευται τῇ εἰκόνι τοῦ κόσμου τῷ ἄντρῳ σύμβολον φρονήσεως θεοῦ ἡ ἐλαία. Αθηνᾶς μὲν γὰρ τὸ φυτὸν, φρόνησις δὲ ἡ Αθηνᾶ. κρατογενοῦς δ’ οὔσης τῆς θεοῦ, οἰκεῖον τόπων ὁ θεολόγος ἐξεύρειν ἐπὶ κρατός τοῦ λιμένος αὐτῆς καθιερώσας, σημαίνων δ’ αὐτῆς ὡς οὐκ Εξ αὐτοματισμοῦ τὸ ὅλον τοῦτο καὶ τύχης ἀλόγου ἔργον γέγονεν, ἀλλ’ ὃτι φύσεως νοερᾶς καὶ σοφίας ἀπότελεσμα χωριστῆς μὲν οὔσης αὐτοῦ, πλησίον δὲ κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς το σύμπαντος λιμένος ἱδρυμένης. ἀειθαλὴς δὲ οὖσα ἡ ἐλαία φέρει τι ἰδίωμα οἰκειότατον ταῖς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ τροπαῖς τῶν ψυχῶν, αὖς τὸ ἄντρον καθιέρωται.


5 Crat. 407a8-c2 for the etymology of Athena’s name, in which Plato says that contemporary interpreters of Homer believed that he represents Athena as ‘mind’ (νοῦς) and as ‘understanding’ (διάνοια). According to the maker of names, Plato claims that Athena is ‘the mind of God’ (ἡ θεοῦ νόησις) because of her possession of an unequalled knowledge about divine things (τὰ θεία νοοῦσα). As regards his connection the stem rhe- with flowing, in Cratylus 41d, Plato also points out that phronesis is the intelligence of conveying and flowing, comprised of φορά, νόησις and ῥόος, so that Plato’s definition of phronesis suits the behaviour of one who advises and guides Odysseus by activating his rational side. See J. M. Dillon (2005) 105-6 for Porphyry’s following Platonic tradition in his identification of Athena with phronesis, particularly Xenocrates; M. Chase (2004) 77 n.3 for the definition of sophia and phronesis.
(32.8-33.3) For since the cosmos was not generated without plan or at random, but is the finished product of wisdom (phronesis) of the God and intellectual nature, the olive tree planted near the cave, the image of the cosmos, is a symbol of wisdom (phronesis) of the God. For the olive tree is the plant of Athena, the goddess is also wisdom (phronesis). Since the goddess was born from the head of the God (Zeus), the theologian (Homer) found a suitable place, in consecrating the olive tree at the head of the harbour, signifying by means of the olive tree that the entire cosmos has not come into being spontaneously, and it was not the work of irrational chance; but that it is the finished product of intellectual nature and wisdom, existing separately from the cave, as the olive tree is situated nearby at the head of the entire harbour. For the olive tree is evergreen, it presents a unique feature, very suitable for the changes of souls in the cosmos, to whom the cave was consecrated.6

Besides his identification of Athena and the olive tree with phronesis, Porphyry states that Homer has also great phronesis7 and he adds that it is the poet who says that 'every foreign possession must be put away in the cave'.8 Furthermore, Homer’s placement of the olive tree near the cave of the nymphs is not a coincidence but the result of his excellence, since the olive tree as the plant of Athena also symbolises the God’s phronesis, and because of its intellectual nature and wisdom, the olive tree stands apart from the cave. Homer’s description of the evergreenness of the olive tree symbolises the idea that ‘the cosmos is governed by the intellectual nature and is guided by eternal and evergreen phronesis’.9 The guidance of eternal and evergreen phronesis, located at the top of the cosmos, is in sharp contrast with the process of genesis which is reflected in ‘ever-flowing water,’ ἀέναον ὕδωρ10 under the protection of Naiad nymphs at the bottom.11

6 Unless otherwise indicated the translations are my own.
7 De Antro 36.3: τὴν Ὅμηρου δεσις τις φρόνησις.
8 De Antro 34.1-2: εἰς τούτο τοίνυν φησίν Ὅμηρος δείν τὸ ἄντρον ἀποθέσθαι πάν τὸ ἡξωμέν κτήμα.
9 De Antro 33.10-11: διοικεῖται δὲ καὶ ὁ κόσμος ὑπὸ νοερᾶς φύσεως φρονήσει ἀιδίῳ καὶ ἀειθαλεῖ ἀγόμενος.
10 De Antro 12.10-11; Pl. Leg. 966e2: ἀέναον υόσια is used for the substance of the material world. See Dillon J. M. (2005) 100-1 for a discussion of Xenocrates’ use of the term.
11 Nymph as a fifth kind of living thing, made of water, occurs in Epinomis 985b, a dialogue which proceeds from the Old Academy (Dillon 1996: 287), along with the four kinds of living things made of earth, fire, ether, and air (981c-985a), and it is also defined as demigod (ἡμίθεος), sometimes seen, sometimes hidden and invisible, presenting wonder through its obscure appearance. See also Plutarch De Defectu 415 C and Proclus In Remp. 1.125.29-30
II

Let me first begin the examination of Porphyry’s different characterisation of the goddess in his other works. In Περὶ ἄγαλμάτων (F 359.60-62 Smith = Eusebius Praeparatio Evangelica 3.11.31-32), in addition to his identification of Athena with phronesis, Porphyry associates the goddess with the Moon, though without giving any detail:

"Ὅπερ δὲ Ἀπόλλων ἐν ἡλίῳ, τοῦτο Ἀθηνᾶ ἐν σελήνῃ· ἔστι γὰρ τῆς φρονήσεως σύμβολον, Ἀθρηνᾶ τις οὖσα.

What Apollo is in the Sun, that is Athena in the Moon; for she is symbol of practical wisdom, a kind of Athrena.12

Porphyry’s allegorical interpretation of Athena finds support in Apuleius’ On the God of Socrates (De Deo Socratis) where he links Socrates’ daimon with Homer’s Minerva/Athena and the goddess sort of functions as Achilles’ guardian daimon (20),13 presenting herself in the assembly of the Greeks, but only seen by Achilles, to moderate the wrath of the hero (11).14 Later Apuleius mentions Athena identified with phronesis/prudentia, and depicts her as the

Kroll for nymphs as daimonic figures. Porphyry implies these images of Nymphs as the opposite power (maleficient), unseen and absolutely imperceptible to human senses in De Abstinentia 2.391. Furthermore, the daimones dwelling in water are well-attested in the Chaldaean Oracles (ὑδροβατῆρας, F 92 des Places = Procl. In Tim. 3.110.4-5 Diehl, and νύμφαι πηγαῖαι καὶ ἐνύδρια πνεύματα πάντα, F 216 des Places = Lydus De Mensibus 3.8.1-7); see Majercik (2013) 84-5, 132-3 for the fragments.

12 See L. Simonini (2010) 233: Athrena is the etymology from the verb ἀθρεῖν since she is the sort of person who looks at things.


14 See A. D. Nock (1947) 106-7 for various descriptions of Athena/Minerva as the protector of the heroes such as Odysseus, Telemachus, Hercules, and the emperors, such as Domitian, in antiquity.
companion of Odysseus, or the guiding daimon, who assists the Homeric hero in overcoming all the toils and labours during his return to the homeland (nec aliud te in eodem Ulixe Homerus docet, qui semper ei comitem voluit esse prudentiam, quam poëtico ritu Minervam nuncupavit, De Deo Socratis 24).\(^\text{15}\)

Various passages in Porphyry's commentary on the story of Atlantis are related to his associations of Athena with the Moon and phronesis, in which he interprets the war between Athens and Atlantis as symbolising the war between the souls and daimones.\(^\text{16}\) Porphyry considers Hephaistos as 'skilful mind' (τὸν τεχνικὸν νοῦν) and the earth as the sublunar sphere, while Athena as the Moon receives the seeds of skilful souls from Hephaistos and the earth.\(^\text{17}\)

Elsewhere, Proclus details previous comments on Plato's statement that the temperate balance of seasons (in Attica) creates wise men (τὴν δὲ εὐρασίαν τῶν ὡρῶν τὴν τῶν φρονίμων οἰστικήν, In Timaeus 162.11-12 Diehl, on Timaeus 24c5-7). Porphyry takes εὐρασία as being good adaptation (εὐαρμοστία) because the God divides the whole of space in the demiurgic order and each part of the space accepts souls suitable to it, that belonging to Ares the more spirited ones, that belonging to Apollo the prophetic ones, that belonging to Asclepius those skilled in the art of medicine, and that belonging to Athena the wise ones (αἱ φρόνιμοι).\(^\text{18}\) In a passage where Proclus discusses the dual character of Athena,\(^\text{19}\) Porphyry places Athena in the Moon because the soul acquires its spirited and mild character in the Moon. Accordingly, the dual aspect of Athena emerges as the lover of war and the lover of wisdom in the soul.

If we first apply the dual aspect of Athena to Porphyry's identification of the goddess in De Antro 32.12, the wisdom-loving side of Athena predominates over her war-loving side during the ascent of the soul towards the intelligible realm and Athena operates as the guiding daimon of Odysseus when she gives him beggar's garments to wear and advises him to leave all the valuable gifts of the Phoenicians in the cave. In Porphyry's reading of the Homeric image, phronesis means knowledge of the future, as a result of experience and good

\(^{15}\) A. D. Nock rightly observes, 'Comes is used twice in the sense of the divine companion,' and adds, 'the analogy was natural. Athena was commonly allegorized as wisdom, and τὸ δαιμόνιον, while used of the sign of Socrates, was also a traditional term for divinity in general undifferentiated form,' (1947) 110-11.


\(^{19}\) F 22 Sodano = In Tim. 165.16-23 Diehl, on Tim. 24c7-d3.
judgment, which is supported by the early warning and advice of Athena to Odysseus. This suggestion is also found in *De Abstinentia* 2.41.16-20, in which Porphyry claims that the good *daimones* have the capacity to foretell potential dangers about to be caused by harmful ones. The war-loving side of the goddess appears in the Odyssean struggle against the sea and water-divinities, which symbolise the material world in the treatise. Porphyry’s allusion to Homer’s description of Athena who is the first to meet Odysseus after his disembarking on Ithaca seems to imply that the hero is in the lunar sphere of Athena.

III

If Odysseus’ remoteness from the cave means the acquisition of *phronesis* in achieving a state of impassivity towards all kinds of pleasures, emotions, power and wealth which belong to the material world, we can find a close connection between Porphyry’s identification of Athena with *phronesis*, and the cathartic virtues in *Sententia* 32 Lamberz.20 Porphyry formulates the Neoplatonic doctrine of virtues, namely the civic, the cathartic, the contemplative, and the paradigmatic ones, which gradually lead the soul to achieve human excellence through distinct mental endeavours. All the virtues above the civic ones are contemplative, and purify and direct the soul to the intelligible realm.21 The relevant passages of *Sententia* 32 can explain the levels of virtue at which Odysseus is active, and how Athena or *phronesis* functions in the process of his ascent through the intelligible.

In *Sententia* 32, Porphyry claims that *phronesis* is connected with the reasoning faculty of the soul at the level of the civic virtues, likewise, as courage connects with the part of the soul subject to anger; self-control with agreement and harmony of appetite and reason and justice with accomplishment (*ἐστι φρόνησις μὲν περὶ τὸ λογιζόμενον, Sententia 32.10-11*). After the soul’s mastering of the civic virtues, the cathartic virtues conduct it towards abstinence from bodily activities. At the cathartic level, having *phronesis* means disallowing possession of self by bodily thoughts and weaknesses, and solitude of mind, a task accomplished through the pure exercise of the mind.

20 L. Simonini (2010) 240 also refers to *Sententia* 32 and says: ‘nel *De antro* l’incontro con *phronesis*, sedere nudo sotto l’ulivo, è immagine la progressione dell’individuo sulla via della catarsi, in cui la saggezza consiste nel non seguire il corpo e nel pensare con purezza.’ See also L. Brisson (2005) 632 for the use of the term *phronesis*.

21 Plot. *Em* 1.2.5.4-12; P. Remes (2005) 183 for the resemblance of the process to the Stoic *apatheia* rather than the Academic and Aristotelian *metriopatheia*. 
The cathartic virtues are more honourable than the civic ones by reason of their capacity to purify the soul from twofold badness, one a result of the soul’s association with inferior things, the other a result of excessive passions.\(^{22}\) The civic virtues enable the soul to liberate itself from passions, whereas the cathartic virtues liberate it from evil, that is, from the association with its inferiors. As for the characteristics of all virtues, the paradigmatic virtues relate to Intellect and agree with its essence; the contemplative virtues relate to the soul contemplating Intellect and filling themselves from it. The cathartic virtues of the soul of man relate to those who are purified from body and from the irrational passions and, lastly, the civic virtues relate to restraining the activity of the irrational soul and to moderating passions.\(^{23}\)

The following passage of *Sententia* 32 in particular reveals significant clues that help us identify at which level of virtues Odysseus is operating, and the role of Athena as symbol of *phronesis* in this process:\(^{24}\)

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(32.83-96) \text{τῶν μὲν γὰρ πολιτικῶν μέτρον ἐπιθεῖναι τοῖς πάθεσι πρὸς τὰς ἐν τοῖς κατὰ φύσιν ἐνεργείας· τῶν δὲ καθαρτικῶν τελέως τῶν παθῶν ἀποστῆσαι ἀπὸ τὸ τέως μέτρου λαμβανόντων· τῶν δὲ πρὸς νοῦν ἐνεργῆσαι μηδὲ τοῦ ἀποστῆσαι ἐκ τῶν παθῶν εἰς ἔννοιαν ἐρχομένων· τῶν δὲ μηδὲν πρὸς νοῦν ἐχουσῶν τὴν ἐνέργειαν, ἀλλὰ τῇ αὐτοῦ ὤστις εἰς συνδρομὴν ἀφιγμένων <**>. διὸ καὶ ὁ μὲν κατὰ τὰς πρακτικὰς ἐνεργῶν σπουδαῖος ἦν ἄνθρωπος, ὁ δὲ κατὰ τὰς καθαρτικὰς δαιμόνιος ἄνθρωπος ἢ καὶ δαίμων ἀγαθός, ὁ δὲ κατὰ μόνας τὰς πρὸς τὸν νοῦν θεός, ὁ δὲ κατὰ τὰς παραδειγματικὰς θεῶν πατήρ. Ἐπιμελητέον οὖν μάλιστα τῶν καθαρτικῶν ἥμιν σκεψιμένοις, ὅτι τούτων μὲν ἡ τεῦξις ἐν τῷ βίω τούτῳ, διὰ τούτων δὲ καὶ ἡ εἰς τὰς τιμιωτέρας ἀνοδος.
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That of the civic virtues is to impose measure on the passions for the performance of activities which conform to nature; that of the purificatory (cathartic) virtues is to separate completely from the passions that which has just taken on measure; that of the next level (the contemplative virtues) is to direct one’s activity towards intellect without any longer giving thought to separating oneself from the passions; while as for that of those virtues (the paradigmatic virtues) whose role it is no longer to direct their activity towards intellect, but which have actually come into confluence

\(^{22}\) *Sententia* 32.45-50.
\(^{23}\) *Sententia* 32.71-78.
with its essence, <it is no longer possible to describe their activity>. In view of this, then, he who acts in accordance with the practical (civic) virtues is agreed to be a “good man”, he who acts in accordance with the purificatory ones is a daemonic man, or even a good daemon, one who acts only according to those which are directed towards intellect is a god, and one who practises the paradigmatic virtues is a “father of gods”. 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, and that through these [that] an ascent may be made to the more august levels.

According to this passage, the contemplative and the paradigmatic virtues are only attainable hereafter, since the acquisition of the former would make a god of humans, and of the latter would make him the father of gods. These two virtues should be a privilege of only a small group of people, particularly the philosophers. In that case, the souls who fulfil the goal of achieving the contemplative and the paradigmatic virtues will no longer be subjected to embodiment. Although we know from his autobiographical experiences that Plotinus spiritually claims to have achieved the objective of the paradigmatic virtues by union with Intellect, it was not a permanent state because of his staying in the earthly life (Ennead 4.8.1-11). Porphyry strongly believes that human beings may achieve the objective of the cathartic virtues, that is, achieve an entire detachment of the soul from the passions, in this life. According to him, the person who fulfils the cathartic virtues is called a divine man or good daimon, whereas Porphyry uses the epithet ‘sage,’ σπουδαῖος, for the person at the level of the civic virtues.

As regards the ascription of the virtues of Sententia 32 to the character of Odysseus described in De Antro 35.10-17, the Homeric hero is placed at the early phase of the cathartic virtues because he dresses up as a beggar after stripping naked, with the help of the goddess Athena, namely phronesis:

27 See M. Chase (2004) 15 for the Stoic technical term for ‘sage’, σπουδαῖος. Porphyry defines the moral person (δ ἁσμαχις) compared with the amoral one (δ φαύλος) in De Abstinentia 1.44.2, 10 as follows: ‘the former has reasoning in charge at all times, controlling unreason and handling its reins; the latter busies himself without concern for reasoning and for doing what he does with the help of reasoning.’ Trans. G. Clark (2000) 48.
(35.10-17) οὕς χρὴ πρῶτερον ἀπομειλίξασθαι θυσίαις τε καὶ πτωχοῦ πόνοις καὶ καρτερίαις, ποτὲ μὲν διαμαχόμενον τοῖς πάθεσι, ποτὲ δὲ γοητεύοντα καὶ ἀπατῶντα καὶ παντοτῶς πρὸς αὐτὰ μεταβαλλόμενον, ἵνα γυμνωθῇ τῶν βακέων καθέλη πάντα καὶ οὐδ’ οὔτως ἀπαλλαγῇ τῶν πόνων, ἀλλ’ ὅταν παντελῶς ἐξαλεώς γένηται καὶ ἐν φυσικὸς ἀπείροις καρσασίων καὶ ἐνύλων ἔργων, ὡς πτύον ἔλθαι ἥγεισθαι τὴν κώπην διὰ τὴν τῶν ἐναλίων ὀργάνων καὶ ἔργων παντελὴ ἀπειρίαν.

(35.10-17) These gods (the gods of the sea and of matter) must first be appeased with sacrifices, and with the labours and perseverance of the beggar (Odysseus), contending with the passions at one time, and beguiling and cheating them at another and undergoing a change in all kinds of ways from them, in order that, stripped of his rags, he may overpower them all. And even so he will not be released from toils: this will not happen until he has utterly freed himself from the sea and has become among souls inexperienced in the deeds of the sea and matter, as the oar is deemed to be a winnowing-shovel because of absolute ignorance of nautical instruments and deeds.

In this passage Porphyry remarks that all the sufferings of the hero will end, once he has entirely liberated himself from all the features manifested in the irrational part of the soul. Porphyry's narrative guarantees a successful journey for Odysseus, that is, for the soul to return to its homeland. However, the success of the journey is not guaranteed, since Odysseus' stripping off his rags is not a sufficient effort to rid himself of toils caused by the material world. The verb γυμνόω, 'strip naked,' is an echo of Plato's Gorgias 524d5, whereby Plato implies the soul's 'dissociation from the body' (γυμνωθῇ τοῦ σώματος, Gorgias 524d5). He claims that the soul reflects all its experiences and features because of its manner towards its various pursuits in this life. As a result of this, Plato uses his own myth of the Judgement of Souls (Gorgias 523a-527a) in order to explain why the soul is judged naked by the naked judges so that any misleading decision by appearances is prevented in the reign of Zeus. The metaphor of the soul's nakedness also occurs in De Abstinentia 31.13-17, in which Porphyry urges his audiences to go to the stadium and compete in the Olympiad of the soul after it is stripped naked.28 The image of the 'naked' soul (γυμνῆτες) is frequently used; for instance, in the Chaldaean Oracles, nakedness signifies the

28 In De Antro 33.7-13 Porphyry's the analogy of victorious athletes with olive wreaths and the soul released from many toils.
freedom of the soul from its material substances. In *Ennead* 1.6.1-12, Plotinus also speaks of sacred rites where initiates strip off their clothes in order to be purified, and enter ‘naked’ (γυμνοῖς) into initiation before proceeding to go up, casting off all that is alien to the God.

The predominance of *phronesis* leads Odysseus to contemplate how he would rid his soul of all the deceitful passions and foreign possessions. Since dressing up in beggars’ clothes suggests that Odysseus is still living an earthly life, his inclination towards bodily needs cannot as yet reach the minimum. Beggars’ clothes seem to symbolise the bond which unites the soul to the material world. Porphyry considers ‘being stripped of the rags’ inadequate to overpower all toils, since passive involvement in the earthly life does not guarantee a permanent unity with the intelligible realm, even though we may advance to this unity in the hereafter. Knowledge of the material world will pave the way for Odysseus to become a daimonic man or a good man; however, he still has some difficulties to overcome. As for Athena, as a symbol of *phronesis*, she can be considered the guiding *daimon* of Odysseus, operating as a superior entity which the hero needs until he succeeds in leading his life according to the principles of intellect.

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