IAMBLICHUS, DE ANIMA 38
(66,12–15 FINAMORE / DILLON):
A RESOLVING CONJECTURE?*

The treatise Περὶ ψυχῆς (De anima) by the third-century-CE Neoplatonist Iamblichus, Porphyry’s dissident disciple, can be reconstructed, at least in part, from Stobaeus’s excerpts, which the latter has preserved in his Anthologium.1 Such a reconstruction is of remarkable value not only per se, but also in the light of the heavy influence that Iamblichus’s psychology and anthropology exerted over the later Neoplatonist Proclus – not to mention the extremely interesting comparisons that one can draw with the Christian Middle / Neoplatonist Origen of Alexandria († 255 ca. CE), who had been Plotinus’s fellow disciple at Ammonius Saccas’ school in Alexandria.2

Now, an excellent reconstruction of Iamblichus’s De anima, equipped with a valuable commentary, has been offered by John Finamore and John Dillon.3 Given, however, the textual difficulty of a few crucial points, there is still some room, hopefully, for improvement.

In Chapter 38 of this treatise on the soul Iamblichus is offering a short philosophical doxography concerning the problem of the soul-body relation. First he reports the opinion of “most Platonists”, i.e. that the soul relates to the body (its instrument: σώμα όργανικόν) directly (εὐθύς), that is, without any intermediary. Then he opposes to this view the opinion of “others”, presumably other Platonists, who posit some “wrappings” between soul and body; these serve as “vehicles” of the soul. Here is the relevant passage in Iamblichus’s text as reported by Stobaeus, where a crux is nestled in the manuscript tradition of the Anthologium:

Οἳ δὲ μεταξὺ τῆς τε ἁσωμάτου ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ ἀγγειώδους αἰθέρια καὶ οὐράνια καὶ πνευματικὰ περιβλήματα περιαμπέχοντα τὴν νοερὰν ζωὴν τίθενται προβεβλῆσθαι μὲν αὐτῷ φρουράς ἕνεκεν, ύπηρετείν δὲ αὐτῇ καθάπερ όχήματα.

(De an. 38, p. 66, ll. 12–15 Finamore / Dillon)

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1) On the relevance of Stobaeus’s Anthology to the reconstruction of ancient philosophy see at least G. Reydams-Schils (ed.), Thinking Through Excerpts: Studies on Stobaeus, Tournhout 2011 (Monothéismes et philosophie).

2) These will make the subject of a separate study and, however significant, need not detain us here.

Others (say) that between the incorporeal soul and the earthly (body) ethereal, heavenly, and pneumatic wrappings surrounding the intellectual life-principle are brought forth for its protection serve it as vehicles.

(transl. Finamore / Dillon, p. 67)

Here the adjective ἀγγειώδους, meaning “vessel-like”, and therefore “earthly”, is a conjecture by Ferguson, received by Finamore and Dillon in their edition. But the two manuscripts both read ἀγγελιώδους, albeit with different articles: ms. F, followed by Wachsmuth in his edition of Stobaeus (Anth. 1,49,43, l. 48), has τὴν ἀγγελιώδους certainly in reference to ψυχής. The other manuscript, P, retains what I believe to be the right (albeit incomplete) reading: τοῦ ἀγγελιώδους. It is worth remarking that ἀγγελιώδης, “angelic” or “angel-like”, is not attested in the LSJ, as correctly noted by Finamore and Dillon.4

The reading of ms. F, albeit accepted by Wachsmuth, is certainly incorrect because of the irremediably unsatisfactory meaning it gives rise to: the vehicles would be located “between the incorporeal soul and the angelic soul”. However, all those who speak of intermediate vehicles in ancient philosophy,5 from the Platonists to the Corpus Hermeticum,6 postulate it as intermediary between soul and body, and never between soul and soul. Moreover, no philosopher speaks of an angelic soul and opposes it to an incorporeal soul, as though the angelic soul were corporeal, but there are several and certain attestations of philosophers speaking of an angelic body, as opposed to the mortal, heavy, and gendered body of human beings.

Most notably, Origen spoke of this angelic body at length,7 and Origen was probably well known to Iamblichus.8 Origen deemed angels not bodiless tout court – since only God the Trinity is entirely incorporeal in his view –, but rather endowed with spiritual, light, and immortal bodies, not subject to passions or corruption. Such are angelic bodies, and such were the bodies of all rational creatures or λογικά before some of them, as a result of their fall from the Good, had their

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4) Finamore / Dillon (n. 3 above) 184.
6) CH 10,17 (121,12–19 Nock / Festugière), where the intellect is said to have the soul as a wrapping when it must relate to a body, and the soul in turn is said to have a pneumatic vehicle as a servant for the sake of relating to the body.
9) Their very food is spiritual: De or. 7,23,4 and 27,9–10.
angelic bodies changed into mortal, heavy, earthly, and corruptible bodies (in the case of human beings) or into immortal but dark and “ludicrous” bodies (in the case of demons). At the resurrection, human mortal bodies will return to their angelic state. Ps. Caesarius in a text that comes very close to Origen claims that “angels are incorporeal in respect to us humans, but in themselves they do have bodies, like wind, fire, or air. Indeed, these are fine and immaterial bodies (λεπτὰ καὶ ἄϋλα), free from the density (παχύτης) of our own bodies”. Likewise Cassian – probably the Sabaite, who was familiar with Origen’s writings – observes that angels “too have bodies, albeit much finer than ours (πολλφομεγαὶ ἡμετέρου)”. The terminology of fine angelic bodies is the same as Origen’s in reference to prelapsarian human bodies as reported by Procopius: the human being in paradise already had a body, “fine (λεπτομέρες) and suitable for life in Paradise”. Some of the allegorisers – including Origen in all probability – called this initial body “luminous” (αὐγοειδές) and immortal. Mortal, heavy bodies were given to humans only after their sin: “Initially the soul used the luminous (αὐγοειδές) body as a vehicle (ἐποχεθαι), and this body was later clothed in the skin tunics”. Origen’s depiction of the spiritual body-vehicle as αὐγοειδές is further confirmed by Gobar, the sixth-century theologian who reports this same adjective in this connection. His use of the key-term αὐγοειδές in his paraphrase of Origen reveals that Procopius, too, was referring to Origen when using it. The most important confirmation, though, comes from Origen himself, in two passages. One is of undisputed authenticity and preserved in Greek, where the bodies of angels are described as “ethereal” (αἰθέρια) and “luminous light” (αὐγοειδὲς φως). The other is preserved in Latin, but is of undisputed paternity too: “How great will be the beauty, brightness, and splendour of the spiritual body! ... The nature of this body of ours ... can be brought by the Creator to the condition of a finest, purest, and brightest body, as the condition and deserts of the rational nature will require”. Here the risen body in the τέλος is described as “finest” (corresponding to λεπτομέρες) and “brightest” (corresponding to αὐγοειδές). In addition, the description of such a body as a suitable dwelling place for life in Paradise corresponds perfectly to Procopius’s passage.

Notably, Iamblichus himself reports that “the school of Eratosthenes, the Platonist Ptolemy, and others” (who may include Origen) thought that souls do not receive a body for the first time only when they begin to ensoul the earthly, mortal body, but from the beginning had “finer” bodies (λεπτότερα). This is Ori-
gen’s position and terminology. Plotinus, too, Origen’s fellow disciple, admitted of a “finer” (λεπτότερον) body as a vehicle for the soul; however, unlike Origen, he did not think that the soul is joined to it from the beginning. According to Plotinus, souls in their descent assume a “luminous vehicle” (αὐγοειδές ὄχημα). There is a clear textual correspondence with Origen, who also designated the subtle, spiritual body of rational creatures as λεπτομερές and αὐγοειδές and an ὄχημα (as revealed by ἐποχεῖσθαι in the passage quoted above from Procopius).

The attestation of angelic bodies, but not angelic souls opposed to incorporeal souls, in ancient philosophy and particularly in imperial Platonism is also the main obstacle against the emendation proposed by Finamore and Dillon in their commentary as an alternative to the text that they have printed and that is reproduced above. This is the emendation: μεταξὸς τῆς τε ἁσωμάτου ψυχῆς καὶ τῆς ἀγγελιώδους (καὶ σῶματος), which means: “between the incorporeal soul and the angelic soul (and the body)”. The vehicle of the soul must certainly be intermediate between the soul and the body, but in all of ancient philosophy there is no trace of an angelic soul as opposed to an incorporeal soul. In order to translate “between the incorporeal, angelic soul, and the body” (without a distinction between the incorporeal soul and the angelic soul) one should postulate a Greek μεταξὸς τε ἁσωμάτου ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ ἀγγελιώδους (καὶ σῶματος). This, however, would imply not only the integration of καὶ σῶματος, but also the expunction of τοῦ before ἀγγελιώδους. The article, though, whether feminine (τοῦ) or masculine / neuter (τοῦ), is attested with certainty by both manuscripts, as I have already pointed out.

What I rather suspect is that what dropped at a certain point in the manuscript tradition is not καὶ σῶματος, but rather simply σῶματος. This is indeed very likely to have occurred, due to a kind of sau d’même au même with the preceding ἁσωμάτου. Therefore, the emendation I propose as possible is the following: μεταξὸς τῆς τε ἁσωμάτου ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ ἀγγελιώδους (σῶματος), “between the incorporeal soul and the angelic (body)”, the angelic body being the immortal, incorruptible and non-gendered body of which Origen, as I have mentioned, and other Platonists abundantly spoke. This is the body with which the rational soul is initially equipped, before acquiring a heavy and perishable body as a result of its wrong moral choices. This doctrine, as I am going to show in the next paragraph, is also clear in Proclus, who was very well acquainted with both Iamblichus’s and Origen’s ideas.

Iamblichus indeed described the light and immortal body as an “ethereal, luminous vehicle”, αἰθερεῖδες καὶ αὐγοειδὲς ὄχημα, and contrasted the “finer bodies” (λεπτότερα σῶματα) with the earthly “solid or hard-shelled bodies”, στερεά or ὀστρεώδη σῶματα. Note the lexical affinities with Origen’s description of the light, luminous, and immortal body, and note also Iamblichus’s use of two adjectives with an -ωδες neutral ending in reference to vehicles and bodies of different kinds: αἰθερεῖδες (ὄχημα) and ὀστρεώδη (σῶματα). This makes it far more likely, I think, that in the passage at stake he used, or even coined, the analogous adjective

19) Enn. 3,6,5.
20) Enn. Treatises 14, 26 and 27.
21) Finamore / Dillon (n. 3 above) 185.
22) Ramelli 2011 (n. 8 above).
23) De myst. 3,14. See Finamore (n. 5 above).
Hierocles, who – unlike Origen – upheld the preexistence of souls and metempsychosis, but only of human souls into other human bodies, depicted the light body as a “luminous body” (σύνοψις σώμα) that is the “fine vehicle of the soul”, ψυχής λεπτὸν ὅχημα. Proclus in turn spoke of the “first body” (comparable to the angelic body in Iamblichus’s passage under examination) as attached to the rational soul permanently, and described it, once again, as an σύνοψις ὅχημα that is immaterial, impassible, immortal, and deprived of temporal origin.

This body is “perpetually and congenitally attached to the soul that makes use of it”, and is “immutable in its essence”, a “perpetual” (ἄιδιον) body that “each soul” possesses and that “participates in that soul primarily and from its first existence”. While the lower vehicle of the irrational soul is acquired only at a certain point and is to be discarded, the luminous and immortal vehicle of the rational soul accompanies the latter forever. This is the same position as Origen’s – albeit Origen thought of a transformation of the luminous, immortal body into an earthly and corruptible body, and then of the opposite transformation at the resurrection, rather than the addition of the mortal body to the luminous one and then the shedding of the former – and is also a rejection of Plotinus’s doctrine of the preexistence of disembodied souls.

Origen too rejected that doctrine. Similarly to Origen, Proclus thought that divine souls – what Origen would identify as angels – have a body of that kind, immortal, luminous, impassible, and immaterial (for Origen, an angelic body); demons have in addition a pneumatic vehicle, made out of elements; human beings have yet another body in addition: the earthly, mortal body, at least for the period of their dwelling on earth.

27) ... ἀϊδίος ἐξήρτηται τῆς χρωμένης σαυχτοῦ ψυχῆς καὶ συμφυτοῦ, ὁμεταβλητοῦν ὃν κατ’ ὰσίαν... πάσα ψυχή ἀϊδίον ἔχει σώμα τὸ πρώτος αὐτῆς μετέχον (Elem. theol. 207).
28) Proclus (In Tim. 3,297,21–298,2) distinguishes the first, immortal vehicle of the soul, the “connate vehicle” (σύμφυτον ὅχημα), from a second one, called “vehicle of irrational life” (ἡ ἄλογος ζωή καὶ τὸ ἐκείνης ὅχημα) and “mass” (called ῥόγκος at l. 23 and ἀχλος at l. 28) derived “from the simple elements” (ἀπὸ τῶν ἀπλῶν στοιχείων), a “compound made of various kinds of tunics” (ἐκ παντοδαπῶν χιτώνων συγκεῖμενον) which weighs the soul down. This is because a soul could not pass immediately from immaterial pneuma to the earthly body (ἀμέσως ἀπὸ τῶν ἄλογων πνευμάτων εἰς τὸ δέδε τὸ σώμα χωρεῖν). Therefore, “during their descent to earth souls receive, one after the other, different kinds of tunics (χιτώνας) made of the elements, air, water, and earth, and only afterwards, in the end, enter this thick mass (εἰς τὸν ῥόγκον τὸν παχύν τούτον)”. The “second vehicle” (τὸ δεύτερον ὅχημα) appears again at In Tim. 3,320,20–22, where it is identified again with “the irrational mass (ἄλογος ἄλογος) drawn from fire, air, water, and earth”.
29) See I. Ramelli, Origen of Alexandria: His Identity and Philosophy, forthcoming, Ch. 3: Origen’s Philosophical Anthropology.
30) Theol. Plat. 3,5,125 ff.
Now, after the dropping out of σώματος in the Stobaean passage at stake reporting Iamblichus’s *De anima*, when in the manuscript tradition there remained only μεταξὺ τῆς ἀσωμάτου ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ ἀγγελιώδους – as P reads –, some scribe, trying to make sense of τοῦ ἀγγελιώδους, which by then was left without its noun, changed its article τοῦ into τῆς. Thus, τῆς ἀγγελιώδους – the reading of P today – looked at least grammatically correct, even if the meaning of the phrase “between the incorporeal and the angelic soul” is unacceptable from the philosophical point of view. For no philosopher postulated an angelic soul as opposite to the incorporeal soul, and a vehicle between the two. The conjecture that I have offered, on the contrary, is perfectly satisfactory from the grammatical, philological, philosophical, and textual historical points of view.

This is, then, the whole sentence according to the emendation I propose:

Oἱ δὲ μεταξὺ τῆς ἀσωμάτου ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ ἀγγελιώδους (σώματος) αἰθέρια καὶ οὐράνια καὶ πνευματικά περιβλήματα περιαμπέχοντα τὴν νοερὰν ζωὴν (τίθενται) προβεβλήθαι μὲν αὐτῆς φρουράς ἕνεκεν, ὑπηρετεῖν δὲ αὐτῇ καθάπερ ὀχήματα.

Others (maintain) that between the incorporeal soul and the angelic (body) ethereal, heavenly, and pneumatic wrappings surrounding the intellectual life-principle are brought forth for its protection and serve it as vehicles.

The vehicles are thus posited first between the intellectual soul and the angelic, light and immortal body. Then they also serve as intermediate between the soul and the mortal, heavy and diastematic body, which Iamblichus calls “solid body” soon after, in the immediate continuation of the above-quoted passage: συμμέτρως δ᾽ αὐτῷ καὶ πρὸς τὸ στερεὸν σῶμα συμβιβάζειν μέσοις τισὶ συναπτόντα, “and they [sc. the vehicles] bring it [sc. the intellectual soul] together in due proportion also with the solid body, joining it thereto by means of certain intermediate common bonds”. If Iamblichus had already spoken of the “earthly body” (according to the conjecture ἀγγειώδους) and not of the “angelic body” (according to my reading), he would not have said “also with the solid body”; that is, he would not have used καὶ before πρὸς τὸ στερεὸν σῶμα. The fact that he added καὶ, “also”, in reference to the earthly body is a further indication that three lines before he was not yet speaking of the earthly body, but he rather meant the angelic, immortal body. Then, Iamblichus goes on to say, the vehicles that join the rational soul to the immortal and light body can also join it to the mortal, solid, and diastematic body, once it is taken up.

In this way the conjecture that I have offered as possible would also set right an important point in Iamblichus’s train of thought in the passage under investigation: the vehicles function as intermediaries not only between the intellectual soul and the mortal, heavy body, but also and already between the intellectual soul and the immortal, angelic, and luminous body.