

Plotinus, the Undescended Soul, and the Chariot of the Soul (ὄχημα πνεῦμα)

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Περίληψη: Ο Πλωτίνος θεωρείται ο πατέρας του Νεοπλατωνισμού. Ωστόσο, η θεώρησή του για την ψυχή απομακρύνεται από την «πλατωνική ορθοδοξία» τόσο ως προς το δόγμα του ότι ένα μέρος της ψυχής δεν κατεβαίνει, και μένει στο νοητό, όσο και στην έλλειψη χρήσεως του άρματος της ψυχής (ὄχημα πνεῦμα). Αυτό το άρθρο προτείνει ότι αυτά συνδέονται και ότι, αντί η ψυχή να παίρνει «χιτώνες», ή στρώματα ενσάρκωσης, είναι η ανώτερη ψυχή που παίρνει κατώτερα μέρη της ψυχής για να μεσολαβήσει την σχέση ψυχής και σώματος

Abstract: Plotinus may be understood as the father of Neoplatonism; however, his understanding of the soul departs from ‘Platonic orthodoxy’ both in respect to his belief in the undescended soul and in his lack of use of the chariot of the soul (ochēma pneuma). This article suggests that these are connected and that, rather than the soul taking on layers of embodiment, it is the undescended soul that takes on lower parts of the soul to mediate its relationship with the body.

1. Introduction

The ‘chariot of the soul’ (ὄχημα πνεῦμα) is a distinctive feature of platonic philosophical anthropology, yet its absence is notable in the thought of Plotinus; this article considers the philosophical reasons why Plotinus may have omitted this doctrine and suggests that the accretion of the lower soul and the soul’s mediating powers are enough reason for him to bypass this theory. The first section reviews scholarly treatment of this issue. The second section considers the precedent for this doctrine in the thought of Plato and the early platonic tradition. The third section considers different sorts of matter described by Plotinus. The fourth notes instances where Plotinus could have, but does not, employ the chariot. The fifth examines the unique accretionary role played by the lower soul in the soul’s descent to the body.

2. Scholarship

The notion of the ‘chariot of the soul’ has become a somewhat common *topos* within Platonic scholarship, and, in addition to stand-alone articles and chapters, monograph-length treatments of the topic have emerged.¹ There is one chapter that deals directly with Plotinus’ relationship

¹ E.g., John Finamore, *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul*, American Classical Studies 14 (Chico, Ca: Scholars Press, 1985); Maria Di Pasquale Barbanti, *Ochema-Pneuma e phantasia nel neoplatonismo : aspetti psicologici e prospettive religiose*, Symbolon 19 (Catania: CUECM, 1998). For an East-West comparative, see Simon Paul Cox, *The Subtle Body: A Genealogy*, Oxford Studies in Western Esotericism (New York, NY: Oxford

to the ‘chariot of the soul’. In ‘Plotinus and the Vehicle of the Soul’,² Dillon notes that Plotinus has little use for the ‘vehicle’ because of the enhanced role sense organs play in his understanding of the soul-body relationship. This chapter builds upon an article Dillon had written earlier, which engaged more explicitly with the nature of sense perception in Plotinus.³ In this article, Dillon notes that it is sense organs that are the medium between the sensible and intelligible. To this end, two passages are of note: The first, IV.4 [28] 23, suggests that sensation is a process of translation from irrational sensation (αἴσθησις) to a conception (ἀντίληψις) through understanding (συνήμι); the second, III.6 [26] 1.1–5, indicates that sense perceptions are activities and judgements (ἐνέργειαι καὶ κρίσεις) about affections. In this article, Dillon is engaging with Emilsson’s suggestion that Plotinus is the father, or at least the grandfather, of Cartesianism;⁴ however, Emilsson does make explicit that Plotinus does not have a notion of the *cogito*.⁵

3. Ancient Precedent

The exact point at which the ‘chariot’ came to be formulated as a coherent doctrine within the Platonic tradition remains debated.⁶ The sources of this doctrine, however, are less contested.

Plato provides us with the initial precedent for this doctrine. In the *Timaeus*, we read that souls were mounted upon an *ochēma* and given a tour of the universe before their embodiment; the passage, at 41d-e, reads as follows:

When he had finished this speech, he turned again to the mixing bowl he had used before, the one in which he had blended and mixed the soul of the universe. He began to pour into it what remained of the previous ingredients and to mix them in somewhat the same way, though these were no longer invariably and constantly pure, but of a second and third grade of purity. And when he had compounded it all, he divided the mixture into a number of souls equal to the number of the stars and assigned each soul to a star. He mounted each soul in a carriage, as it were, and showed it the nature of the universe.⁷

Here, we see that human souls originate from the same mixing bowl and, consequently, ingredients as the world soul; however, they are of an inferior grade. This connection is

University Press, 2022). Also, consider the doctoral thesis Stéphane Toulouse (2001), *Les théories du véhicule de l'âme : genèse et évolution d'une doctrine de la médiation entre l'âme et le corps dans le néoplatonisme* [unpublished doctoral thesis at the École pratique des hautes études].

² John Dillon, ‘Plotinus and the Vehicle of the Soul’, in *Gnosticism, Platonism and the Late Ancient World: Essays in Honour of John D. Turner*, Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 82 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 485–96.

³ John Dillon, ‘Plotinus, the First Cartesian?’, *Hermathena*, no. 149 (1990): 19–31.

⁴ Eyjólfur Kjalar Emilsson, *Plotinus on Sense-Perception A Philosophical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), esp. 145–8.

⁵ ‘In short, the “cogito” and its implications are absent in Plotinus’: Emilsson, 148.

⁶ Halfwassen suggest an Academic origin for the notion: Jens Halfwassen, ‘Bemerkungen zum Ursprung der Lehre vom Seelenwagen’, *Jahrbuch für Religionswissenschaft und Theologie der Religionen* 2 (1995): 114–28. Bos, however, places the origin of the doctrine with Aristotle, e.g. Abraham P. Bos, ‘The “Vehicle of Soul” and the Debate over the Origin of This Concept’, *Philologus* 151, no. 1 (1 June 2007): 31–50. Kissling notes this notion to be a product of the ‘melting pot of Neo-Platonism’: Robert Kissling, ‘The OXHMA-PINEYMA of the Neo-Platonists and the De Insomniis of Synesius of Cyrene’, *The American Journal of Philology* 43, no. 4 (1922): 318. However, one could well, with Dillon, place this doctrine in the early Roman Imperial period: Dillon, ‘Plotinus and the Vehicle of the Soul’, 486–87.

⁷ *Tim.* 41d4–41e2: Ταῦτ’ εἶπε, καὶ πάλιν ἐπὶ τὸν πρότερον κρατῆρα, ἐν ᾧ τὴν τοῦ παντὸς ψυχὴν κεραννὺς ἔμισγεν, τὰ τῶν πρόσθεν ὑπόλοιπα κατεχεῖτο μίσγων τρόπον μὲν τινα τὸν αὐτόν, ἀκήρατα δὲ οὐκέτι κατὰ ταῦτα ὡσαύτως, ἀλλὰ δεύτερα καὶ τρίτα. συστήσας δὲ τὸ πᾶν διεῖλεν ψυχὰς ἰσαριθμούς τοῖς ἄστροις, ἐνειμέν θ’ ἐκάστην πρὸς ἕκαστον, καὶ ἐμβιβάσας ὡς ἐς ὄχημα τὴν τοῦ παντὸς φύσιν ἔδειξεν...: Plato, ‘Timaeus’, trans. Donald J. Zeyl, in *Plato. Complete Works*, eds John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997).

important, as it gives the human soul the same capacities as the world soul. The number of human souls, as we read, is equal to that of the stars, and each soul has a home star. Notably, here, souls are already created as individuals; there is not a ‘fall’ into individuality. The chariot enters the picture during the tour of the universe each soul receives prior to its embodied life. The statement is clear: the demiurge mounts each soul as if on a chariot and, then, the demiurge shows the soul the nature of the universe (ἐμβιβάσας ὡς ἐς ὄχημα τὴν τοῦ παντὸς φύσιν ἔδειξεν). Here, the chariot would appear vital to the soul’s transportation throughout the celestial region of the universe.

Phaedrus is another important dialogue due to its direct use of chariot imagery. Plato presents the three parts of the soul as a ‘connate *dynamis*’, writing:

Let us then liken the soul to the natural union of a team of winged horses and their charioteer. The gods have horses and charioteers that are themselves all good and come from good stock besides, while everyone else has a mixture. To begin with, our driver is in charge of a pair of horses; second, one of his horses is beautiful and good and from stock of the same sort, while the other is the opposite and has the opposite sort of bloodline.⁸

While the term *ochēma* is not used here, this passage is a clear precedent for discussing the soul with an eye to chariot imagery. With respect to the choice of chariot imagery, Yunis notes that ‘Plato follows a venerable tradition in using the chariot - for the Greeks the most powerful engine of movement - for literary purposes’.⁹

One further *locus* from the Platonic corpus that fuels the connection between the *ochēma* and the afterlife context occurs at *Phaedo*, where we read that souls mount vehicles before undergoing posthumous retribution and purification for how they have lived their earthly lives. We read,

Such is the nature of these things. When the dead arrive at the place to which each has been led by his guardian spirit, they are first judged as to whether they have led a good and pious life. Those who have lived an average life make their way to the Acheron and embark upon such vessels as there are for them and proceed to the lake. There they dwell and are purified by penalties for any wrongdoing they may have committed; they are also suitably rewarded for their good deeds as each deserves.¹⁰

Here, we see the notion of the chariot paired with a retributive theory of the afterlife. Thus, in some form, the chariot enables one to experience purification and penalisation for the actions taken in this life (ἀναβάντες ἃ δὴ αὐτοῖς ὀχήματά ἐστιν).

At some point, Plato’s chariot imagery gets combined with Aristotle’s understanding of *pneuma*. Of note is the way in which *pneuma* comes to take up functions that are normally attributed to the lower parts of the soul. For instance, *pneuma* is understood to be the seat of

⁸ *Phaedr.* 246a6-b4: εὐοικέτω δὴ συμφύτῳ δυνάμει ὑποπτέρου ζεύγους τε καὶ ἡνιόχου. θεῶν μὲν οὖν ἵπποι τε καὶ ἡνιόχοι πάντες αὐτοὶ τε ἀγαθοὶ καὶ ἐξ ἀγαθῶν, τὸ δὲ τῶν ἄλλων μέμικται. καὶ πρῶτον μὲν ἡμῶν ὁ ἄρχων συνωρίδος ἡνιοχεῖ, εἶτα τῶν ἵππων ὁ μὲν αὐτῷ καλὸς τε καὶ ἀγαθὸς καὶ ἐκ τοιούτων, ὁ δ’ ἐξ ἐναντίων τε καὶ ἐναντίος: Plato, ‘Phaedrus’, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, in *Plato. Complete Works*, eds John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997).

⁹ Harvey Yunis, *Plato: Phaedrus*, Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 138.

¹⁰ *Phaedo* 113d4-e1: Τοῦτων δὲ οὕτως πεφυκότων, ἐπειδὴν ἀφίκωνται οἱ τετελευτηκότες εἰς τὸν τόπον οἷ ὁ δαίμων ἕκαστον κομίζει, πρῶτον μὲν διεδικάσαντο οἷ τε καλῶς καὶ ὀσίως βιώσαντες καὶ οἱ μὴ. καὶ οἱ μὲν ἂν δόξωσι μέσως βεβιωκέναι, πορευθέντες ἐπὶ τὸν Ἀχέροντα, ἀναβάντες ἃ δὴ αὐτοῖς ὀχήματά ἐστιν, ἐπὶ τοῦτων ἀφικνοῦνται εἰς τὴν λίμνην, καὶ ἐκεῖ οἰκοῦσι τε καὶ καθαιρόμενοι τῶν τε ἀδικημάτων διδόντες δίκας ἀπολύονται, εἴ τις τι ἡδίκηκεν, τῶν τε εὐεργεσιῶν τιμὰς φέρονται κατὰ τὴν ἀξίαν ἕκαστος: Plato, ‘Phaedo’, trans. G. M. A. Grube, in *Plato. Complete Works*, eds John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997).

the nutritive and sensitive soul;¹¹ thus, it is the site of *phantasia*. Moreover, Aristotle develops the notion of the ‘connate *pneuma*’,¹² which appears to be the vehicle that transmits the soul in the act of reproduction.

We now have the key components for the vehicle of the soul, namely Plato’s imagery and Aristotle’s connate spirit. That said, it should be noted that *pneuma* came to play a decisive role in post-Aristotelian thought. On the one hand, the Stoics identified the soul as *pneuma* – a connection which appears to be key for the Platonists who attribute psychic notions such as *phantasia* to the *ochēma*; on the other hand, *pneuma* came to play a decisive role in medical discussions.¹³ However, we must bypass such uses of *pneuma* to return to our investigation of Plotinus.

4. Intelligible and Subtle Matter

Within Plotinus’ thought, there are three sorts of matter. In addition to the matter that composes the world of our everyday experience, Plotinus maintains that there is a more tenuous, but still material, sort of ‘subtle’ matter and, furthermore, that there is ‘intelligible’ matter. It is this ‘subtle’ matter that is of particular interest for our investigation of the ‘chariot’. However, before we treat ‘subtle’ matter, let us briefly outline the nature of intelligible matter.

Plotinus primarily engages with the notion of intelligible matter at II 4 [12] 2-5.¹⁴ As a Platonist, Plotinus is committed to an exemplarist understanding of reality. Thus, whatsoever is ‘here’, that is in the sensible world, must also be ‘there’, that is in the intelligible world: this includes matter. To this end, Plotinus writes,

Further, if there is an intelligible universal order There, and this universe here is an imitation of it, and this is composite, and composed of matter, then there must be matter There too.¹⁵

Here, the reasoning is straightforward; whatsoever is found in the perceptible world must exist in the intelligible, and this is true also of matter. Here, we also see Plotinus using the shorthand of Here and There, which is used to denote the sensible and intelligible realms, respectively.

Just before the passage cited above, Plotinus lays out the crucial ontological role that matter plays in the intelligible realm. As is known, Plotinus’ philosophy hinges upon the notion of unity, being grounded in the One, which is a pure unity, unfurling to the levels of *Nous*, which is one-many, and continuing to the hypostasis of Soul, which is one-and-many.¹⁶ In this

¹¹ *De gen. anim.* 744a 1-5.

¹² *De motu anim.* 19, 703a, 9.

¹³ For more, see Sean Coughlin, David Leith, and Orly Lewis, eds., *The Concept of Pneuma after Aristotle*, Berlin Studies of the Ancient World 61 (Berlin: Edition Topoi, 2020).

¹⁴ For a commentary on this section, see A. A. Long, *Plotinus. Ennead II.4: On Matter*, The Enneads of Plotinus (Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2022), 89–108; Paul Kalligas, *The Enneads of Plotinus: A Commentary*, trans. Elizabeth Key Fowden and Nicolas Pilavachi, vol. 1 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014), 309–14. For pertinent scholarly treatments, see Dmitri Nikulin, *Neoplatonism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 90–115; Kevin Corrigan, *Plotinus’ Theory of Matter-Evil and the Question of Substance: Plato, Aristotle, and Alexander of Aphrodisias*, *Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale* 3 (Leuven: Peeters, 1996), 35–44, 267–73; John M. Rist, ‘The Indefinite Dyad and Intelligible Matter in Plotinus’, *The Classical Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (1962): 99–107; A. Hilary Armstrong, *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus: An Analytical and Historical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 66–68.

¹⁵ Plotinus, *Enneads* II 4 [12] 4, 7-9: Ἐτι εἰ κόσμος νοητὸς ἔστιν ἐκεῖ, μίμημα δὲ οὗτος ἐκείνου, οὗτος δὲ σύνθετος καὶ ἐξ ὕλης, κακεῖ δὲ ὕλην εἶναι. Translations of Plotinus are taken from Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. A. H. Armstrong, Loeb Classical Library 440, 441, 442, 443, 444, 445, 468 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 440: 1969, 441: 1966, 442: 1967, 443: 1984, 444: 1984, 445: 1988, 468: 1988)

¹⁶ For this nomenclature occurs throughout the *Enneads*, e.g., Plotinus, *Enn.* V 1 [10] 8, 23–26; IV 8 [6] 3.

significant passage, Plotinus tells us that, in Intellect, it is form that introduces diversity, and that it is actually intellectual matter that provides this realm with its unity. These lines read as follows,

If, then, the Forms are many, there must be something in them common to them all; and also something individual, by which one differs from another. Now this something individual, this separating difference, is the shape which belongs to each. But if there is shape, there is that which is shaped, about which the difference is predicated. Therefore, there is matter which receives the shape, and is the substrate in every case.¹⁷

Thus, somewhat unexpectedly, rather than serving as a *principium individuationis*, matter serves as a *principium unitatis*. Each form, in virtue of its shape, is at variance with the other forms, and, as such, the unity of *Nous* arises from its uniform substrate: intelligible matter. On the distinction between intelligible and sensible matter, Corrigan writes,

The difference between intelligible and sensible matter is that the former is eternally the same form and also the whole intelligible world at once, whereas the latter is eternally receiving different forms. Sensible matter is all things in turn, but only one thing at a time (3, 9-14). Plotinus concludes, therefore, that there is ‘shape or form in both the sensible and the intelligible worlds, but that each world has its shape in different ways’.¹⁸

Sensible matter is only capable of being one form at any given time, while intelligible matter is all forms at once.

It is now clear that Plotinus developed a theory of intelligible matter, and this served to unify the hypostasis of *Nous*. However, the sort of matter that most closely resembles the ‘chariot of the soul’ is tenuous, but nevertheless material. Let us turn now to consider this subtle matter.

Our clearest witness to subtle matter occurs as part of Plotinus’ discussion of the embodiment of daemons. The passage occurs as part of a broader discussion of the nature of *erōs* in *Ennead III 5*:

But how do they participate in matter, of any sort at all? Obviously not in bodily matter, or they will be perceptible living creatures. Even if they do take as well bodies of air or fire, their nature must certainly have been different before, to give them any possibility of participating in body. For that which is altogether pure does not directly combine with body; though many people think that a body of air or fire is included in the substantial nature of a spirit in so far as it is a spirit. But why does one substance combine with body and another not, unless there is something responsible for the combination in the case of one that combines? What, then, is responsible? One must suppose an intelligible matter, in order that a being which has a share in it may come to this matter here of bodies by means of it.¹⁹

¹⁷ Plotinus, *Enneads* II 4 [12] 4, 2-7: Εἰ οὖν πολλὰ τὰ εἶδη, κοινὸν μὲν τι ἐν αὐτοῖς ἀνάγκη εἶναι· καὶ δὴ καὶ ἴδιον, ᾧ διαφέρει ἄλλο ἄλλου. Τοῦτο δὴ τὸ ἴδιον καὶ ἡ διαφορὰ ἢ χωρίζουσα ἢ οἰκεία ἐστὶ μορφή. Εἰ δὲ μορφή, ἔστι τὸ μορφοῦμενον, περὶ δὲ ἡ διαφορὰ. Ἔστιν ἄρα καὶ ὕλη ἢ τὴν μορφήν δεχομένη καὶ αἰεὶ τὸ ὑποκείμενον.

¹⁸ Corrigan, *Plotinus’ Theory of Matter-Evil and the Question of Substance: Plato, Aristotle, and Alexander of Aphrodisias*, 37.

¹⁹ Plotinus, *Enneads* III 5 [50] 6, 35-45: Ἀλλὰ πῶς καὶ τίνας ὕλης μετέχουσιν; Οὐ γὰρ δὴ τῆς σωματικῆς, ἢ ζῶα αἰσθητὰ ἔσται. Καὶ γὰρ εἰ σώματα προσλαμβάνουσιν ἀέρινα ἢ πύρινα, ἀλλὰ δεῖ γε πρότερον διάφορον αὐτῶν τὴν φύσιν εἶναι, ἵνα καὶ μετὰσχῶσι σώματος· οὐ γὰρ εὐθὺς τὸ καθαρὸν πάντη σώματι μίγνυται· καίτοι πολλοῖς

Daemons, Plotinus notes, do not participate in mundane matter, for they would, in that case, be perceptible. They are, nevertheless, embodied.²⁰ This particular sort of embodiment, we read, is composed elementally of either air (ἀέρος) or fire (πυρός); thus, we can locate *daemons* in the spheres of either air or fire.²¹ Plotinus tells us that the role of this body, whatever its precise composition, is to enable beings that share in it to come to the realm of material bodies we inhabit. Thus, as Kalligas points out,²² this subtle body plays a mediating role between soul and corporeal nature. However, Plotinus stops short of introducing the *ochēma*. Indeed, this use of ‘intelligible matter’ appears to be a ἄπαξ γεγονός in Plotinus’ thought, and Smith notes that Plotinus appears discontent with the need for mediation.²³

5. The Plotinian Lacuna

Plotinus does not have a pronounced understanding of the ‘chariot of the soul’; however, at the same time, it is not altogether absent from his thought. While the specific use of the noun ὄχημα is absent from Plotinus’ oeuvre, Smith has drawn attention to the use of the infinitive ὀχεῖσθαι and of other terms that are reminiscent of the vehicle, such as the terms γεωδέστερα, βάρυσιν, ἐβαρύνθη, and ἐφελκομέναι.²⁴ This language occurs at IV 3, where we observe souls taking different sorts of bodies upon themselves as they descend into the cosmos. The text reads as follows,

The souls when they have peeped out of the intelligible world, go first to heaven, and when they have put on a body there go on by its means to earthier bodies, to the limit to which they extend themselves in length. And some souls [only] come from heaven to lower bodies; others pass from one body into another, those whose power is not sufficient to lift them from this region because they are weighed down and forgetful, dragging with them much that weighs upon them. They become different either because of the variety of the bodies into which they entered or because of their fortunes or their upbringing, or they themselves bring with them a difference coming from themselves, or all these causes, or some of them, operate together to produce the differences.²⁵

δοκεῖ ἡ οὐσία τοῦ δαίμονος καθ’ ὅσον δαίμων μετά τινος σώματος ἢ ἀέρος ἢ πυρός εἶναι. Ἀλλὰ διὰ τί ἡ μὲν σώματι μίγνυται, ἡ δὲ οὐ, εἰ μὴ τις εἴη τῆ μίγνυμένη αἰτία; Τίς οὖν ἡ αἰτία; Ὑλὴν δεῖ νοητὴν ὑποθέσθαι, ἵνα τὸ κοινωνῆσαν ἐκείνης ἦκη καὶ εἰς ταύτην τὴν τῶν σωμάτων δι’ αὐτῆς.

²⁰ The embodiment of *daemons* and angels is a commonplace in late antiquity, e.g., Origen, *De principiis* pref. 8; Porphyry, *De abstinentia* II. 39.

²¹ The elemental composition of any given body determined is cosmological position, and the arrangement of the elements is spherical, with earth being at the centre, water being next, followed by air, and, ultimately fire; after fire, was the celestial region. Air was considered hot and wet, while fire was considered hot and dry. For further discussion, see David C. Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science: The European Scientific Tradition in Philosophical, Religious, and Institutional Context, Prehistory to A.D. 1450*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 52–56.

²² ‘As cause of the corporeality of demons, P. nominates—by way of hypothesis—an “intelligible matter” (*hulē noētē*), which would make intermediation possible from the purely intelligible Soul to corporeal nature’: Kalligas, *The Enneads of Plotinus: A Commentary*, 2014, 1:525.

²³ ‘Plotinus is not happy about the idea of fiery bodies as intermediaries yet his peculiar use of the concept of νοητὴ ὕλη as an intermediary between total incorporeality and the material world seems to be dictated partly by the semi-corporeal nature of the πνεῦμα/ὄχημα’: Andrew Smith, *Porphyry’s Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition: A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism* (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 153.

²⁴ Smith, 152.

²⁵ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV 3 [27] 15, 1-10: Ἰασι δὲ ἐκκύψασαι τοῦ νοητοῦ εἰς οὐρανὸν μὲν πρῶτον καὶ σῶμα ἐκεῖ προσλαβοῦσαι δι’ αὐτοῦ ἤδη χωροῦσι καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ γεωδέστερα σώματα, εἰς ὅσον ἂν εἰς μῆκος ἐκταθῶσι. Καὶ αἱ μὲν ἀπ’ οὐρανοῦ εἰς σώματα τὰ κατωτέρω, αἱ δὲ ἀπ’ ἄλλων εἰς ἄλλα εἰσκρινόμεναι, αἷς ἡ δύναμις οὐκ ἤρκεσεν ἄραι

This passage is striking due to the spatial language used by Plotinus to discuss the soul's movement and descent. Armstrong, on the one hand, attributes this language to Plotinus' 'cosmic religiosity';²⁶ Kalligas, on the other, suggests that the participle ἐκκῦψασαι ought to be taken as a shift of attention, rather than a spatial one.²⁷ Nevertheless, this language persists just a few sections later, where we read,

One could deduce from considerations like the following that the souls when they leave the intelligible first enter the space of heaven. For if heaven is the better part of the region perceived by the senses, it borders on the last and lowest parts of the intelligible. So these heavenly regions are first ensouled thence, and participate in soul first because they are better adapted to participate. But the body of earth is the last, and less naturally adapted to participate in soul and far from the bodiless nature.²⁸

Here, we see the soul's sojourn through the heavens as part of its descent to the body. Such an account can be understood as developing out of what we saw earlier in Plato's *Timaeus*, where souls are given a tour of the universe before embodiment. However, the added detail that heaven is the better part because it borders on the lowest parts of the intelligible is a striking sentiment. After all, the intelligible is taken to be a non-spatial entity. Perhaps it is possible to weaken the force of this language by appealing to metaphor and cosmic piety; nevertheless, these physical descriptions of spiritual motion cannot be altogether ignored.

Plotinus' engagement with the chariot can also be found when he discusses the soul-body relationship. Consider the following comment on the different ways in which the soul can enter the body:

Now there are two ways of soul entering body; one is when a soul is already in a body and changes bodies, or passes from a body of air or fire to one of earth (people do not call this change of body because the body from which entry is made is not apparent); and the other, passage from bodilessness to any kind of body, which would of course be the first communication of soul with body. About this last, then, it will be proper to investigate what it is that happens when a soul which is altogether pure and free from body takes upon itself a bodily nature.²⁹

έντεῦθεν διὰ βάρυνσιν καὶ λήθην πολλὴ ἐφελκομέναις, ὃ αὐταῖς ἐβαρύνθη. Γίνονται δὲ διάφοροι ἢ σωμάτων εἰς ἃ ἐνεκρίθησαν παραλλαγαῖς ἢ καὶ τύχαις ἢ καὶ τροφαῖς, ἢ αὐταὶ παρ' αὐτῶν τὸ διάφορον κομίζουσιν ἢ πᾶσι τούτοις ἢ τισιν αὐτῶν.

²⁶ 'Here there appears the "cosmic religiosity" which Plotinus shared with other philosophers of late antiquity: the belief, that is, that the celestial regions and the heavenly bodies are divine and far closer to any higher, spiritual or intelligible, divinities there may be, than the world below the moon, and that consequently the primary and proper material abode of souls is in this higher region from which they descend, assuming progressively inferior sorts of bodies according to the depth of their descent, the earthly body being the last and lowest' (Armstrong's trans., p. 82n2).

²⁷ 'the participle *ekkupsasai* does not necessarily entail movement in space, but rather a mere shifting of the souls' gaze and focus of attention': Paul Kalligas, *The Enneads of Plotinus: A Commentary*, trans. Nickolaos Koutras, vol. 2 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2023), 50.

²⁸ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV 3 [27] 17, 1-7: 'Ὅτι δὲ ἐκ τοῦ νοητοῦ εἰς τὴν οὐρανοῦ ἴασιν αἱ ψυχαὶ τὸ πρῶτον χώραν, λογίσαιτο ἂν τις ἐκ τῶν τοιούτων. Εἰ γὰρ οὐρανὸς ἐν τῷ αἰσθητῷ τόπῳ ἀμείνων, εἴη ἂν προσεχῆς τῶν νοητῶν τοῖς ἐσχάτοις. Ἐκείθεν τοίνυν ψυχούται ταῦτα πρῶτα καὶ μεταλαμβάνει καὶ τῆς ἀσωμάτου φύσεως πόρρω.

²⁹ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV 3 [27] 9, 3-12: 'Ἐπεὶ τοίνυν διττὸς ὁ τρόπος τῆς εἰς σῶμα ψυχῆς εἰσόδου—ἢ μὲν γὰρ γίνεται ψυχῆ ἐν σώματι οὕση τῇ τε μετενσωματουμένη καὶ τῇ ἐκ σώματος ἀερίνου ἢ πυρίνου εἰς γῆιν γινομένη, ἢν δὴ μετενσωμάτωσιν οὐ λέγουσιν εἶναι, ὅτι ἄδηλον τὸ ἀφ' οὗ ἢ εἰσκρῖσις, ἢ δὲ ἐκ τοῦ ἀσωμάτου εἰς ὀτιοῦν σῶμα, ἢ δὴ καὶ πρώτη ἂν εἴη ψυχῆ κοινωνία σώματι—ὀρθῶς ἂν ἔχοι ἐπισκέψασθαι περὶ ταύτης, τί ποτέ ἐστι τὸ γινόμενον πάθος τότε, ὅτε ψυχῆ καθαρὰ οὕσα σώματος πάντη ἴσχει περὶ αὐτὴν σώματος φύσιν.

Here, Plotinus clarifies that his focus is the initial joining of soul to any sort of body, not the transition from aethereal to material body. This initial joining of soul to body is the true philosophical problem, but the question of aethereal embodiment ought not to be dismissed as a ‘fiction’,³⁰ as it is a theory that was taken seriously by a great number of Platonists. Moreover, in the hands of subsequent Platonists, even some of Plotinus’ texts were understood to be gesturing at the ‘chariot’; this is particularly true of the following passage:

But they change from the whole to being a part and belonging to themselves, and, as if they were tired of being together, they each go to their own. Now when a soul does this for a long time, flying from the All and standing apart in distinctness, and does not look towards the intelligible, it has become a part and is isolated and weak and fusses and looks towards a part and in its separation from the whole it embarks on one single thing and flies from everything else; it comes to and turns to that one thing battered by the totality of things in every way, and has left the whole and directs the individual part with great difficulty; it is by now applying itself to and caring for things outside and is present and sinks deep into the individual part.³¹

This passage is taken from the early treatise ‘On Descent of the Soul into Bodies’, and it makes particularly clear that, for Plotinus, the sin of the soul that leads to descent is that of self-isolation; the result of this is that the soul ‘sinks deep into the individual part’ (δύσα αὐτοῦ πολὺ εἰς τὸ εἶσω). Fleet, in his commentary, draws particular attention to the participle ἐπιβᾶσα, which is used to discuss the ‘embarking’ that occurs as part of the soul’s descent, as a term upon which subsequent Platonists ceased in order to demonstrate Plotinus’ belief in the ‘chariot of the soul’.³² This ‘embarking’ or ‘mounting’ is, thus, part of the soul’s preparation for descent into this world.

At *Ennead* III 6, there appears to be a pairing of the lower part of the soul with *pneuma*, which appears to place *pneuma* as the medium of *phantasia*. Here, we read:

But the purification of the part subject to affections is the waking up from inappropriate images and not seeing them, and its separation is effected by not inclining much downwards and not having a mental picture of the things below. But separating it could also mean taking away the things from which it is separated

³⁰ ‘Among the cases he will not be examining he includes those of “imperceptible reincarnation,” which had been supported by certain Platonists. As Iamblichus testifies in *De an.* apud Stob. *Ecl.* I 49.39 (trans. Finamore and Dillon), this view, which had been espoused, among others, by Eratosthenes and Ptolemy the Platonist (see my comment on *VP* 20.49), posited that “the soul is always in a body and passes from subtler bodies into dense bodies. For it spends time in some portion of the sensible world, and descends into solid body at different times from different places in the universe.” Cf. also above, my comment on 4.6–9, and the relevant account found in Plutarch *De fac.* 28–29, 943c–944c. P. was not willing to preoccupy himself with such fictions that merely transpose the problem of the soul’s embodiment to an extraterrestrial, and therefore extra-empirical, stage of its life. What he is concerned with is how the soul comes into contact with corporeal nature in general’: Kalligas, *The Enneads of Plotinus: A Commentary*, 2023, 2:39–40.

³¹ IV 8 [6] 4, 10–21: Μεταβάλλουσαι δὲ ἐκ τοῦ ὅλου εἰς τὸ μέρος τε εἶναι καὶ ἑαυτῶν καὶ οἶον κάμνουσαι τὸ σὺν ἄλλῳ εἶναι ἀναχωροῦσιν εἰς τὸ ἑαυτῶν ἐκάστη. Ὅταν δὲ τοῦτο διὰ χρόνων ποιῆ φεύγουσα τὸ πᾶν καὶ τῇ διακρίσει ἀποστάσα καὶ μὴ πρὸς τὸ νοητὸν βλέπει, μέρος γενομένη μονοῦται τε καὶ ἀσθενεῖ καὶ πολυπραγμονεῖ καὶ πρὸς μέρος βλέπει καὶ τῷ ἀπὸ τοῦ ὅλου χωρισμῷ ἐνός τινος ἐπιβᾶσα καὶ τὸ ἄλλο πᾶν φυγοῦσα, ἐλθοῦσα καὶ στραφεῖσα εἰς τὸ ἐν ἐκείνο πληττόμενον ὑπὸ τῶν [ὄλων καὶ] πάντων, τοῦ τε ὅλου ἀπέστη καὶ τὸ καθέκαστον μετὰ περιστάσεως διοικεῖ ἐφαπτομένη ἤδη καὶ θεραπεύουσα τὰ ἔξωθεν καὶ παροῦσα καὶ δύσα αὐτοῦ πολὺ εἰς τὸ εἶσω.

³² ‘The Greek literally means “it has embarked on one single thing.” This phrase was seen by later Neoplatonists (e.g., Proclus in *Tim.* 3.236, 31ff. and Philoponus in *de Anima* 18, 26–31) as proof that Plotinus believed that the human soul, after leaving its star, embarked on a vehicle that was made of breath (*pneuma*) or light (*phōs*) as an intermediary between the intelligible and sensible’: Barrie Fleet, *Ennead IV.8: On the Descent of the Soul into Bodies* (Las Vegas, NV: Parmenides Publishing, 2012), 135.

when it is not standing over a vital breath turbid from gluttony and sated with impure meats, but that in which it resides is so fine that it can ride on it in peace.³³

Purification, thus, is linked to purification from *phantasia*. Yet, in its purified state, it emerges that the soul continues to ‘ride’ (ὀχεῖσθαι) upon a *pneuma* (ἐπὶ πνεύματος). Thus, in its pure state, there appears to be some sort of subtle embodiment that does not impede the soul.

The most likely candidate for this sort of embodiment is the ‘chariot’. Indeed, even Kalligas, who is frequently reticent to suggest the presence of the ‘vehicle’ in Plotinus’ thought, considers this to be a reference to the *ochēma pneuma*; moreover, Kalligas even points to a second purificatory route that may include theurgy.³⁴

6. The Descent of the Soul

We have now seen that there are clear characteristics of the ‘chariot’ in Plotinus’ thought in various respects. Yet, the question remains: why does Plotinus not cultivate this notion in the same way as other Platonists? The notion of the ‘chariot’ was clearly used prior to Plotinus, and it is observable in a figure such as Galen (*PHP* VII 7.25, 474.22–27). Likewise, Plotinus’ student Porphyry deploys this notion (see Proclus’ report at *In Tim.* 3.234, 32fr). Thus, Plotinus was almost certainly familiar with this ethereal form of embodiment. Above, we noted how Dillon, in his chapter ‘Plotinus and the Vehicle of the Soul’, takes the sense organs to bridge the gap between material and immaterial realities; thus, the topic has been considered from this perspective. Let us build upon this by considering how Plotinus’ doctrine of the undescended soul and the accretions the soul receives in its descent reduce his need to depend upon the ‘vehicle’ to explain the soul-body relationship.

Plotinus’ doctrine of the undescended soul is unique amongst the Platonists. Even he acknowledges this:

And, if one ought to dare to express one’s own view more clearly, contradicting the opinion of others, even our soul does not altogether come down, but there is always something of it in the intelligible.³⁵

Subsequent Platonists also note Plotinus’ departure from Platonic orthodoxy.³⁶ Thus, in both his belief in the undescended soul and the absence of the *ochēma pneuma*, we find Plotinus departing from Platonic commonplaces – perhaps there is a relation here?

The true self, for Plotinus, lies squarely in our disembodied intellect.³⁷ Thus, it is hardly surprising that, in his account of *eudaimonia*, Plotinus restricts the sphere of ‘well-being’ to

³³ Plotinus, *Enneads* III 6 [26] 5, 24-29: Καίτοι ἀπαθὲς ὁμῶς ὃ καὶ ἐν θολερῷ. Τοῦ δὲ παθητικοῦ ἢ μὲν κάθαρσις ἢ ἔγερσις ἐκ τῶν ἀτόπων εἰδώλων καὶ μὴ ὄρασις, τὸ δὲ χωρίζεσθαι τῇ μὴ πολλῇ νεύσει καὶ τῇ περὶ τὰ κάτω μὴ φαντασίᾳ. Εἴη δ’ ἂν καὶ τὸ χωρίζειν αὐτὸ τὸ ἐκεῖνα ἀφαιρεῖν ὧν τοῦτο χωρίζεται, ὅταν μὴ ἐπὶ πνεύματος θολεροῦ ἐκ γαστριμαργίας καὶ πλήθους οὐ καθαρῶν ἢ σαρκῶν, ἀλλ’ ἢ ἰσχνὸν τὸ ἐν ᾧ, ὡς ἐπ’ αὐτοῦ ὀχεῖσθαι ἡσυχῇ.

³⁴ ‘This second way differs markedly from the first, in that it is by no means a purely contemplative method, but even appears to leave some margin for the employment of theurgic and other similar cathartic means. It includes the purgative emaciation of the body (cf. *VP* 2.4–5 and 8.21–22), but also the purification of the “breath-spirit” (*pneuma*) from licentious tendencies such as “gluttony” (*gastri margia*: cf. Pl. *Phd.* 81e6, *Ti.* 73a6, *CH* VI 3, 74.13). Although P. does not in general appear to show much interest in the pertinent Middle Platonic belief (see, e.g., Atticus fr. 15; Dodds 1963, 313–18; Dillon 1973a, 371–72; Kehl 1978, 998–1000; Scott 1991, 77–83, 150–61; and my comment on *II* 2.2.21–22), in the present passage he seems to be alluding directly, albeit in somewhat peirastic fashion, to the belief concerning a “spiritual vehicle” (*pneumatikon ochēma*) that envelops the soul during the process of its embodiment, and that is the agent of its affections and its humbler desires’: Kalligas, *The Enneads of Plotinus: A Commentary*, 2014, 1:551.

³⁵ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV 8 [6] 8, 1-3: Καὶ εἰ χρὴ παρὰ δόξαν τῶν ἄλλων τολμῆσαι τὸ φαινόμενον λέγειν σαφέστερον, οὐ πᾶσα οὐδ’ ἢ ἡμετέρα ψυχῇ ἔδου, ἀλλ’ ἔστι τι αὐτῆς ἐν τῷ νοητῷ ἀεί.

³⁶ E.g., Proclus, *in Alc.* 227.2–9; Iamblichus *de Myst* 28, 6-11.

³⁷ E.g., Plotinus, *Enneads* IV 8 [6] 4.1–24; cf. V 1 [10] 1, 1–17.

that which pertains to the soul. More surprising, however, is the way in which Plotinus restricts *eudaimonia* to the parts of the soul that do not have to do with the body. Consider the following passage from ‘On Well-Being’:

Man, and especially the good man, is not the composite of soul and body; separation from the body and despising of its so-called goods make this plain. It is absurd to maintain that well-being extends as far as the living body, since well-being is the good life, which is concerned with soul and is an activity of soul, and not of all of it—for it is not an activity of the growth-soul, which would bring it into connexion with body.³⁸

Thus, it would appear that the human, here exemplified by the *spoudaios*, is purely the higher self, and not a soul-body composition. Due to this strict identification of the self with the higher self, Plotinus precludes not only the body from *eudaimonia*, but also the lower parts of the soul. Elsewhere, Plotinus characterises the lower aspect of the self as an ‘addition’ or ‘appendage’ (I 4 [46] 5, 18: προσθήκη), suggesting that it is not vital to who ‘we’ are.

Plotinus famously uses the image of Glaucus from Plato’s *Republic* (X 611D7–612A5) to explain the relationship between the higher and lower self. Here, Plotinus explains that it is not only the body but indeed the lower parts of the soul that are considered accretions. He writes,

The argument which concludes that the soul is sinless assumes that it is a single completely simple thing and identifies soul and essential soulness; that which concludes that it sins interweaves with it and adds to it another form of soul which is affected in this dreadful way: so the soul itself becomes compound, the product of all its elements, and is affected as a whole, and it is the compound which sins, and it is this which for Plato is punished, not that other single and simple soul. This is why he says, “We have seen the soul like the people who see the sea-god Glaucus.” But, he says, if anyone wants to see its real nature, they must “knock off its encrustations” and “look at its philosophy,” and see “with what principles it is in contact” and “by kinship with what realities it is what it is.” So there is another life of soul, and other activities, and that which is punished is different. The ascent and the separation is not only from this body but from all that has been added.³⁹

Here, we see that ascent and separation are not only from the body, but from all that has been added (προστεθέντος), which suggests that more than the body is added in the course of embodiment. This is also made clear earlier in the passage, where we read that, while the soul itself is simple, it becomes compound when inhabiting the body. Thus, for one to ‘knock off one’s crustations’, it would appear that, in addition to the bodily element, one must knock off the lower parts of one’s soul. Thus, rather than the soul receiving garments in the form of subtle

³⁸ Plotinus, *Enneads* I 4 [46] 14, 1-8: Τὸ δὲ μὴ συναμφοτέρον εἶναι τὸν ἄνθρωπον καὶ μάλιστα τὸν σπουδαῖον μαρτυρεῖ καὶ ὁ χωρισμὸς ὁ ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος καὶ ἡ τῶν λεγομένων ἀγαθῶν τοῦ σώματος καταφρόνησις. Τὸ δὲ καθόσον ἀξιοῦν τὸ ζῆον τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν εἶναι γελοῖον εὐζωίας τῆς εὐδαιμονίας οὐσης, ἢ περὶ ψυχὴν συνίσταται, ἐνεργείας ταύτης οὐσης καὶ ψυχῆς οὐ πάσης—οὐ γὰρ δὴ τῆς φυτικῆς, ἵν’ ἂν καὶ ἐφήματο σώματος:

³⁹ Plotinus, *Enneads* I 1 [53] 12, 6-20: Ὁ μὲν γὰρ τὸ ἀναμάρτητον διδοὺς τῇ ψυχῇ λόγος ἐν ἀπλοῦν πάντῃ ἐτίθετο τὸ αὐτὸ ψυχὴν καὶ τὸ ψυχῇ εἶναι λέγων, ὁ δ’ ἁμαρτεῖν διδοὺς συμπλέκει μὲν καὶ προστίθεισιν αὐτῇ καὶ ἄλλο ψυχῆς εἶδος τὸ τὰ δεινὰ ἔχον πάθῃ· σύνθετος οὖν καὶ τὸ ἐκ πάντων ἡ ψυχὴ αὐτῇ γίνεται καὶ πάσχει δὴ κατὰ τὸ ὅλον καὶ ἁμαρτάνει τὸ σύνθετον καὶ τοῦτό ἐστι τὸ διδόν δίκην αὐτῷ, οὐκ ἐκεῖνο. Ὅθεν φησί· τεθεάμεθα γὰρ αὐτήν, ὡσπερ οἱ τὸν θαλάττιον Γλαῦκον ὀρῶντες. Δεῖ δὲ περικρούσαντας τὰ προστεθέντα, εἴπερ τις ἐθέλει τὴν φύσιν, φησίν, αὐτῆς ἰδεῖν, εἰς τὴν φιλοσοφίαν αὐτῆς ἰδεῖν, ὧν ἐφάπτεται καὶ τίσι συγγενῆς οὐσά ἐστιν ὅ ἐστιν. Ἄλλη οὖν ζωὴ καὶ ἄλλαι ἐνεργεῖαι καὶ τὸ κολαζόμενον ἕτερον· ἢ δὲ ἀναχώρησις καὶ ὁ χωρισμὸς οὐ μόνον τοῦδε τοῦ σώματος, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἅπαντος τοῦ προστεθέντος.

material envelopes, in its descent to the body, it would appear that it is the true self that is being shrouded in the soul's lower layers.⁴⁰ In addition, we see Plotinus using the same vocabulary to discuss our relationship to our lower self; here, he notes that separation is from what has been added (I 1 [53] 12, 19-20: προστεθέντος), a clear parallel with the earlier citation which saw the lower self described as an 'addition' (προσθήκη).

When properly ordered, the body belongs to the soul; when improperly ordered, the soul becomes the property of the body. One is able to maintain the correct balance between the soul and body when one is careful not to let the soul descend too deeply into the body. Plotinus warns of this when he writes,

For, as there are two reasons why the soul's fellowship with body is displeasing, that body becomes a hindrance to thought and that it fills the soul with pleasures, desires and griefs, neither of these things could happen to a soul which has not sunk into the interior of its body, and is not anyone's property, and does not belong to the body, but the body belongs to it, and is of such a kind as to want nothing and be defective in nothing; so that the soul will not be filled with desires or fears; for it will never have any frightening expectations about a body of this kind, nor does any business make it turn to what is below and take it away from the better, blessed vision, but it is always directed to those higher realities and sets this world in order with a power which requires no active effort.⁴¹

The key to our ability to philosophise, as Plotinus details it here, is not to let the soul sink into the body (IV 8 [6] 2, 42-53 46-7: μὴ εἰς τὸ εἶσω ἔδω τοῦ σώματος).⁴² Thus, while one lives an embodied life, one must remain vigilant not to allow the soul to become too involved with the affairs of the body. Thus, it is the soul's fate to live an amphibious life, living both 'Here' and 'There'; Plotinus reminds us of this when he notes,

Souls, then, become, one might say, amphibious, compelled to live by turns the life There, and the life here: those which are able to be more in the company of Intellect live the life There more, but those whose normal condition is, by nature or chance, the opposite, live more the life here below.⁴³

The soul, thus, is constantly pulled between its higher, true nature and the body it inhabits. This dual existence earns the soul the epithet of being 'amphibious'.

The soul, Plotinus tells us, participates in both intelligible and perceptible orders. Thus, the soul, by nature, plays a mediating role. This is particularly clear, when we read:

Since this nature is twofold, partly intelligible and partly perceptible, it is better for the soul to be in the intelligible, but all the same, since it has this kind of nature,

⁴⁰ Also consider Rist's note on this point, 'this integration is achieved the lower elements become as garments lying about the upper soul; they are now recognised as wholly inessential and really are inessential. They can no longer be called parts of the soul (μέρη), since they clothe the true self without any act of will on its part. They are the pure accidents of earthly life': John M. Rist, 'Integration and the Undescended Soul in Plotinus', *American Journal of Philology* 88, no. 4 (1967): 420.

⁴¹ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV 8 [6] 2, 42-53: Δύο γὰρ ὄντων δι' ἃ δυσχεραίνεται ἡ ψυχῆς πρὸς σῶμα κοινωνία, ὅτι τε ἐμπόδιον πρὸς τὰς νοήσεις γίγνεται, καὶ ὅτι ἡδονῶν καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν καὶ λυπῶν πίμπλησιν αὐτήν, οὐδέτερον τούτων ἂν γένοιτο ψυχῆς, ἢ τις μὴ εἰς τὸ εἶσω ἔδω τοῦ σώματος, μηδὲ τινός ἐστι, μηδὲ ἐκείνου ἐγένετο, ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνο αὐτῆς, ἔστι τε τοιοῦτον, οἷον μήτε τινός δεῖσθαι μήτε τινὶ ἐλλείπειν· ὥστε μηδὲ τὴν ψυχὴν ἐπιθυμιῶν πίμπλασθαι ἢ φόβων· οὐδὲν γὰρ δεινὸν μήποτε περὶ σώματος προσδοκῆση τοιοῦτου, οὔτε τις ἀσχολία νεῦσιν ποιούσα κάτω ἀπάγει τῆς κρείττονος καὶ μακαρίας θεας, ἀλλ' ἐστὶν αἰεὶ πρὸς ἐκείνους ἀπράγμονι δυνάμει τόδε τὸ πᾶν κοσμοῦσα.

⁴² This language was also noted in our earlier citation of IV 8 [6] 4, 10-21.

⁴³ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV 8 [6] 4, 31-35: Γίγνονται οὖν οἷον ἀμφίβιοι ἐξ ἀνάγκης τὸν τε ἐκεῖ βίον τὸν τε ἐνταῦθα παρὰ μέρος βιοῦσαι, πλεῖον μὲν τὸν ἐκεῖ, αἱ δύνανται πλεῖον τῷ νῶ συνεῖναι, τὸν δὲ ἐνθάδε πλεῖον, αἷς τὸ ἐναντίον ἢ φύσει ἢ τύχαις ὑπῆρξεν.

it is necessarily bound to be able to participate in the perceptible, and it should not be annoyed with itself because, granted that all things are not the best, it occupies a middle rank among realities, belonging to that divine part but being on the lowest edge of the intelligible, and, having a common boundary with the perceptible nature, gives something to it of what it has in itself and receives something from it in return, if it does not use only its safe part in governing the universe, but with greater eagerness plunges into the interior and does not stay whole with whole;⁴⁴

Again, we read about the double nature of the soul, which is positioned at the end of the intelligible, sharing a common boundary with perceptible nature. Moreover, Plotinus diagnoses the problem of the soul to be its falling away from the whole and plunging into the ‘interior’. Once more, we see the language of descent and plunging (IV 8 [6] 7, 10: εἰς τὸ εἶσω δύνουτο). Yet, the language in this passage also gives us an important detail about the soul, namely that it occupies a ‘middle rank’ (IV 8 [6] 7, 5: μέσην τάξιν). Thus, the soul is, by nature, a mediator.

If the soul itself is a mediator between intelligible, namely *nous*, and sensible realities, then it seems that there is little reason to posit subtle forms of embodiment that are responsible for reconciling the soul-body relationship. Thus, the soul does not need to put on layers of subtle matter to interact with the body. Instead, as we observed above, it is the higher soul that puts on the lower parts of the soul to interact with the body. Thus, following what Plato tells us about the soul at *Laws X*, namely that it is a mediating entity between form and matter, it would appear that for Plotinus too the soul is a mediating entity between *nous* and *hylē*. Thus, it would appear that an important reason for not needing a mediating body between soul and body is that the soul itself is equipped to facilitate this interaction.

7. Conclusion

Plotinus uses the lower parts of the soul to facilitate the soul-body relationship, making the doctrine of the *ochēma pneuma* superfluous to his thought. Thus, while this does not altogether answer the question of how material and immaterial substances interact, it does save us from kicking the proverbial can down the philosophical road by introducing mediating bodies composed of subtler matter. Above, we reviewed the source for the doctrine of the ‘chariot’, reviewed the three sorts of matter present in Plotinus’ thought, and noted *loci* in Plotinus’ thought where the *ochēma* could be asserted, but more often isn’t. We concluded by documenting the fact that the lower parts of the soul, in addition to the body, are considered as accretions. Thus, for Plotinus, it is the lower soul that takes up the functions that the *ochēma* plays for other Platonists.

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⁴⁴ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV 8 [6] 7, 1-11: Διττῆς δὲ φύσεως ταύτης οὔσης, νοητῆς, τῆς δὲ αἰσθητῆς, ἄμεινον μὲν ψυχῆ ἐν τῷ νοητῷ εἶναι, ἀνάγκη γε μὴν ἔχειν καὶ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ μεταλαμβάνειν τοιαύτην φύσιν ἐχούση, καὶ οὐκ ἀγανακτητέον αὐτὴν ἑαυτῇ, εἰ μὴ πάντα ἐστὶ τὸ κρεῖττον, μέσην τάξιν ἐν τοῖς οὔσιν ἐπισχούσαν, θείας μὲν μοίρας οὔσαν, ἐν ἐσχάτῳ δὲ τοῦ νοητοῦ οὔσαν, ὡς ὁμορον οὔσαν τῇ αἰσθητῇ φύσει διδόναι μὲν τι τοῦτῳ τῶν παρ’ αὐτῆς, ἀντλαμβάνειν δὲ καὶ παρ’ αὐτοῦ, εἰ μὴ μετὰ τοῦ αὐτῆς ἀσφαλοῦς διακοσμοῦ, προθυμία δὲ πλείονι εἰς τὸ εἶσω δύνουτο μὴ μείνασα ὅλη μεθ’ ὅλης

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