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HIEROCLES OF ALEXANDRIA AND THE VEHICLE OF THE SOUL*

With the widening scope of Neoplatonic studies, Hierocles of Alexandria is finally receiving due recognition¹. Although he will remain overshadowed by the intellectual subtlety and enormous productivity of his younger contemporary, Proclus, Hierocles nonetheless played an important role in the history of Neoplatonism. He studied with Plutarch of Athens and was introduced by him to the teachings of Ammonius Saccas, Plotinus, Origen (the pagan), Porphyry and Iamblichus. To Hierocles should go the credit for inaugurating the exchanges and dialogues carried on by the philosophers of Athens and Alexandria in the fifth and sixth century. He wrote two works, a Commentary on the Golden Verses of the Pythagoreans, which survives, and a treatise, *On Providence*, of which we have extracts and paraphrases from Photius².

Within Hierocles' philosophy the Neoplatonic doctrine of the vehicle of the soul holds a prominent place³. What accounts for this doctrine's importance among Neoplatonists is, to my mind, best seen in Hierocles. Because Hierocles was not terribly original but excelled in setting forth the ideas of others, he has been aptly described as 'un professeur'⁴. Hierocles professes, in a straightforward, unadorned manner, a deliberately simple theology, especially in contrast to the intricate systems constructed by other Platonists⁵. Likewise, his treatment of the luminous body or vehicle of the soul is rather uncomplicated, and it therefore lends itself excellently for illustrating the great attraction of the doctrine in late antiquity.

* This is a revised version of a paper read for the session of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies at the Fifteenth International Conference on Patristic, Mediaeval, and Renaissance Studies at Villanova University, September 21, 1990.

¹ See the monumental study by N. AUJOUAT, *Le Néoplatonisme Alexandrin. Hiéroclès d'Alexandrie*, Leiden 1986.

² The edition of the Commentary used for this paper is that of F. W. KOEHLER, *Hieroclis in Aureum Pythagoreorum Carmen commentarius*, Stuttgart 1974, henceforth simply referred to by page and line number. For the *De Providentia*, see codex 214 in R. HENRY, ed., *Photius, Bibliothèque*, iii, Paris 1962, and codex 251, id., vii, 1974.

³ See AUJOUAT, *Le Néoplatonisme Alexandrin*, 228-85; see also T. KOBUSCH, *Studien zur Philosophie des Hierokles von Alexandrien*, Munich 1976, 118-22; I. HADOT, *Le problème du néoplatonisme alexandrin: Hiéroclès et Simplicius*, Paris 1978, 98-106.

⁴ AUJOUAT, *Le Néoplatonisme Alexandrin*, 421.

⁵ E.g. Hierocles appears not to have posited the existence of a One beyond *voûs*; see AUJOUAT, *Le Néoplatonisme Alexandrin*, 55-65, but this is forcefully contested by I. HADOT, most recently in *Revue des Études Grecques* 103, 1990, 241-62.

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The theory of the vehicle, which Hierocles believed could already be found in Pythagoreanism (112, 5–6), was primarily a development of Neoplatonism, though inspired by Plato, Aristotle, and certain Stoic teachings⁶. In the *Timaeus* Plato had related how the demiurge mounted the souls, each upon a star ‘as upon a chariot’ (ὥς ἐς ὄχημα, 41e1–2), and in the well-known analogy of the *Phaedrus* the soul *in toto* is likened to a winged chariot traversing the heavens (264a ff.). Aristotle had compared the πνεῦμα, the warm substance transmitted by semen in the procreative act and serving as the locus of the nutritive, sensitive, and imaginative soul, to the element of which the stars were made⁷. Following Aristotle, the Stoics had taught that the soul was a hot πνεῦμα, composed of fire and air; it not only acted as the vital principle of the body but also enabled the functions of sensation, imagination, and reasoning (*logos*)⁸. We do not know who first wedded Plato’s ὄχημα and the Aristotelean-Stoic πνεῦμα, but by the late third century A.D. the ὄχημα-πνεῦμα was an established doctrine⁹. Although Plotinus gave it little importance¹⁰, his pupil Porphyry relied extensively on the vehicle to explain the journeys of the soul. The ὄχημα-πνεῦμα is also found, with different modifications, in the Chaldean Oracles, in Origen the Christian, Didymus of Alexandria, Iamblichus, Sy-

⁶ The best survey of this doctrine remains E. R. DODDS, ed., Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*², Oxford 1963, 313–21; see also J. F. FINAMORE, *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul*, Chico, Calif. 1985, 1–6, with further literature at 7 n. 1; W. DEUSE, *Untersuchungen zur mittel- und neuplatonischen Seelenlehre*, Wiesbaden 1983, 218 n. 331; cf. O. GEUDTNER, *Die Seelenlehre der chaldäischen Orakel*, Meisenheim 1971, 18 n. 83.

⁷ GA 736^b37–8. On Aristotle’s ‘inherent breath’ (πνεῦμα σύμφυτον) see also Somn. Vig. 456^a12 and W. D. ROSS, ed., *Aristotle’s Parva Naturalia*, Oxford 1955, 40–3. Cf. n. 8 below.

⁸ See St. V.F. I. 134–141, 146; LONG-SEDLEY 53 A–B, E–H; D. HAHM, *The Origins of Stoic Cosmology*, Ohio State University Press, 1977, 70–71. For Chrysippus, as A. A. LONG puts it, the πνεῦμα became ‘the vehicle of the λόγος’ (*Hellenistic Philosophy*², Berkeley and Los Angeles 1986, 155). Cf. B. INWOOD, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism*, Oxford 1985, 21. For the psycho-physical link of soul-πνεῦμα and body the Stoics will have also looked to Aristotle’s σύμφυτον πνεῦμα, M.A. 10; see INWOOD, op. cit., 51 and n. 7 above. Already Plato, *Tim.* 42a6, had described sense perception as σύμφυτος; cf. n. 17 below. On the Stoic *pneuma*, see further R. SORABJI, *Matter, Space, and Motion*, Ithaca 1988, 83–105.

⁹ It may already have been known to Middle Platonists (Atticus and Albinus in the second century A.D.); see J. DILLON, *Iamblichus Chalcidensis in Platonis dialogos commentariorum fragmenta*, Leiden 1973, 371–2; KOBUSCH, *Studien zur Philosophie des Hierokles*, 118. A tenable argument that Poseidonius provided the catalyst for the Neoplatonic linkage of the πνεῦμα and the luminous body is made by N. AUJOUAT, ‘De la phantasia et du *pneuma* stoiciens d’après Sextus Empiricus, au corps lumineux neo-platonicien’, *Pallas* 34, 1980, 123–46, esp. 132 ff.

¹⁰ In *Enn.* IV 3 [27]. 15, 1–3 Plotinus alludes to the vehicle: ‘The souls when they 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 . . .’ (ARMSTRONG’S translation). In the same treatise (IV. 3. 9, 5–6), when Plotinus describes the passing of the soul from an aerial or fiery body (ἐκ σώματος ἀερίνου ἢ πυρίνου) to one of earth, he may also be referring to the vehicle. In *Enn.* III 6 [26]. 5, 29, the allusion is more direct: Plotinus speaks hypothetically of a purified *pneuma*, so fine that the soul can ride (ὀχεῖσθαι) on it. See FINAMORE *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle*, 3.

nesius, Syrianus, Proclus, Hermias, Damascius, and Philoponus; it is variously called the luminous body (αὐγοειδὲς σῶμα), the astral vehicle (ἀστροειδὲς ὄχημα), or the pneumatic (πνευματικόν) vehicle or body¹¹.

The basic framework for the doctrine is the conception of man as a being composed, first, of a rational, pre-existent essence, his mind or the rational part of the soul, that has its source in God and the intelligible, immutable realm of being. But man also has an irrational nature, the ἄλογος part of his soul, which is closely allied with the body and the physical, changeable world of becoming. Plato's 'Timaeus' provides the source text: the demiurge fashions the divine, immortal part of the soul, to which the younger gods weave the mortal part that is joined to man's corporal nature and subject to irrational sense perception (41c–42d, cf. 28a2, 69d4). For later Platonists the bipartition of the soul into rational and irrational parts, and the general dualism of mind and matter, became virtually canonical in their philosophy of man and the cosmos.

The polar conception of man, as just reviewed, is then the foundational structure accepted by Hierocles. Human life is twofold: our mortal life-form (ζῷον) consists of the irrational life (i.e., the irrational soul) and the material body; but this form of life is only an image (εἶδωλον) of man, since the true man is composed of a rational essence (or soul) and the immaterial body¹². Let us first concentrate on this higher niveau. Man's rational essence receives from the demiurge a body appropriate to its nature, a 'co-natural body' (συμφυὲς σῶμα, 110, 22; cf. 120, 2). This is not the gross, mortal body of earth but, as Hierocles says expressly, the luminous body; he adduces in addition the term 'subtil vehicle of the soul' (ψυχῆς λεπτὸν ὄχημα) from the Chaldaean Oracles¹³. Since the rational soul itself is bodiless (ἄσώματον), it achieves its form (εἶδος) in a body (111, 2–3). The luminous body is thus necessary for the soul to be a substance (οὐσία), though not, strictly speaking, in the Aristotelean sense of form residing in matter, given that the luminous body is immaterial (ἄϋλον)¹⁴. Hierocles clearly distinguishes corporeality and materiality¹⁵. The luminous body is indeed a σῶμα but not composed of material elements; it is a spiritual body.

To explain the symbiosis – if I may call it such – of the rational soul and its immaterial body, Hierocles resorts to a particularly revealing use of Plato. Commenting on the Pythagorean Verses that exhort to abstinence from certain foods,

¹¹ See R. C. KISSLING, 'The ὄχημα-πνεῦμα of the Neo-platonists and the *De insomniis* of Synesius of Cyrene', *Am. J. Phil.* 43, 1922, 320 n. 21.

¹² 112, 14–17, cf. 111, 12–13; HADOT, *Le problème du néoplatonisme alexandrin*, 99.

¹³ 112, 9 = Chald. Or. fr. 120, cited after R. MAJERCIK, *The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation, and Commentary*, Leiden, 1989, whose numeration of the fragments retains that of É. DES PLACES' edition (*Oracles Chaldaïques*, Paris, 1971).

¹⁴ See, e.g., 112, 14 and 17, 117, 9. Cf. Syrianus, *In Met.* 85, 27–8 KROLL; Proclus, *El. Th. prop.* 208 (p. 182 DODDS), *In Tim.* iii 297. 25 DIEHL.

¹⁵ See AUJOULAT, *Le Néoplatonisme Alexandrin*, 271–2.

to purification of the soul, and to the establishment of knowledge as ones 'charioteer', Hierocles (111, 13ff.), predictably, draws heavily from the Phaedrus. He recalls that Plato opened his famous image by likening the soul to the 'united force' (σύμφυτος δύναμις) of a team of winged horses and charioteer (246a). But while Plato's purpose was to illustrate the immortality of the soul, Hierocles' discussion tends towards a practical aim. He takes the σύμφυτος δύναμις as the actual force that unites soul and luminous body, whereby σύμφυτος implies that the latter is created with the soul, hence 'congenital' with it¹⁶. In Hierocles' hands Plato's imagery becomes a valid technical explanation for the interrelationship of soul and luminous body¹⁷.

We move next from the composite being that is man's higher self to the lower self, the level of the irrational and earthly that man shares with the beasts. The reasons for the fall of the soul in Hierocles are not my primary concern here, but the role of the luminous body in this descent is¹⁸. The vehicle loses its wings, a moulting, as Hierocles calls it, imitating Plato¹⁹, and it carries the soul into an

¹⁶ This is brought out well by AUJOLAT, *Le Néoplatonisme Alexandrin*, 236–7. See also n. 17 below.

¹⁷ That the soul has this congenital body also works to its disadvantage, as we will see below when we consider the vehicle's role in bringing the soul down to earth. This unfortunate tendency of the luminous body towards the material may have been inspired in part by another Platonic use of σύμφυτος (and in part by the Aristotelean-Stoic σύμφυτον πνεῦμα; see nn. 7 and 8 above). In the Phaedo (81cff.), the departed soul of an impure person is 'interpenetrated by the corporeal' (διειλημμένην . . . ὑπὸ τοῦ σωματοειδοῦς), which is 'ingrained' (as ARCHER-HIND aptly renders σύμφυτον here) in the soul through its life-long association with the body; this corporeal element, described as burdensome, heavy, earthly, and even visible, keeps some souls hovering about their tombs until imprisoned again in a body. (Plato also links the irrationality of sense perception to its being inherent [σύμφυτον] to the body; see n. 8 above; on sense perception as ἄλογος, see further Tim. 28a2, 69d4 and A. SILVERMAN, 'Plato on Perception and »Commons«', Cl. Qu. 40, 1990, 148–75, esp. 149–58.) Proclus, In Remp. i 119. 12–21 KROLL, interprets the passage from the Phaedo as referring to the vehicles of departed souls, which, because they are shadowy, tinged by matter, and still weighed down by the mortal form of the body, can be seen by some people. It is noteworthy that Origen, c. Cels. 2.60, writing some time before both Hierocles and Proclus, in reference to this same Platonic passage had spoken of the soul subsisting 'in what is called the luminous body' (ἐν τῷ καλουμένῳ αὐγοειδεῖ σώματι – a good indication of the source of the doctrine in Middle Platonism; see n. 9 above; on Origen, see H. S. SCHIBLI, 'Origen, Didymus, and the Vehicle of the Soul', forthcoming in *Origeniana Quinta*, ed. R. DALY, Louvain, 1992). For both Origen and Proclus it is the material accretions of the luminous body that explain its sometime visibility (while at the same time it should be imagined that its luminosity would become more opaque as the medium, beset by material stains, suffers considerable loss of transparency). Porphyry, de Antr. Nymph. 11, 17–19 NAUCK, speaks of the vehicle being thickened by moisture and thereby made visible. See also n. 20 below.

¹⁸ The foremost causes of the soul's fall are its voluntary turning away from the good and its forgetfulness; see the concise discussion in KOBUSCH, *Studien zur Philosophie des Hierokles*, 122–30.

¹⁹ πεπεορρήσις, 98, 19, cf. Plato, Phdr. 246c2.

earthly body. Yet even though the soul has now become incarnate, Hierocles repeatedly asserts that it is the luminous body or the vehicle that is in direct contact with the earthly body²⁰. The soul's possession of the luminous body turns out to be a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it contributes to the descent of the soul, providing the vehicle for the *katabasis* into generation. On the other hand, once the soul has arrived at this inferior estate, the luminous body creates a kind of buffer between the rational soul and the mortal body, allowing man's *ψυχὴ λογικὴ* to retain its essential immutability²¹. Both aspects highlight the main function of the luminous body: to be an intermediary between the polarities in man, polarities that in the Neoplatonic scheme of things are also reflections of the cosmos.

The combination of negative and beneficent aspects to the luminous body is further seen in the ascent of the soul. Insofar as the luminous body is in direct contact with the earthly body, it is tainted and weighed down by it. Hence for the rational soul to be able to return to its blessed, pristine estate in the knowledge of God, it must not only practice the anagogic virtues (love, hope, and truth)²², but its vehicle must also be purified. Hierocles rather systematically delineates the required steps in the process of purification. During this lifetime we must purify our rational soul from our irrational substance, which has come to us as a result of the soul's decline into generation. But our lower nature is also comprised of a mortal body that is joined to our luminous body. Therefore, the luminous body must be purified of the mortal body and delivered of all sympathy with it (113, 1–6). Purification extends to the material body itself. As the latter is purified through fasting and discipline (112, 10–11), the luminous body is able to free itself from the weight and pollution of matter; it becomes winged again, and bears the soul aloft²³.

²⁰ 112, 11–12, 113, 8–9. Contrast Proclus' more refined scheme by the introduction of a second vehicle (thereto, see also n. 29 below): In Tim. iii 297, 24–5 DIEHL, Proclus specifically raises the question how souls are going to pass immediately from their immaterial bodies into this body (*καὶ πῶς γὰρ ἔμελλον ἀμέσως ἀπὸ τῶν αὐτῶν πνευμάτων εἰς τόδε τὸ σῶμα χωρεῖν*; *pace* SORABJI, Matter, Space, and Motion, 107, τῶν αὐτῶν πνευμάτων does not yet include the second pneumatic vehicle). The answer given in the context of Proclus' discussion (iii 297, 16ff.) is that the passage is not immediate, in other words, not without a medium, because to the first vehicle are added tunics (*χιτῶνες*) of simple elements, airy, watery, and earthly. By these tunics, in effect the second vehicle, the souls 'are clothed in mass . . . as something foreign to the congenital vehicle of the souls' (*ἐνεδύσαντο . . . ὄχλον . . . ὥς ἀλλότριον μὲν τοῦ συμφύτου τῶν ψυχῶν ὀχήματος*, 28–9). Since these material tunics would also render the transparent luminous body more visible (see n. 17 above), it is worthwhile to compare Aristotle's definition of the transparent in *de An.* 418^b4–7, which indeed Proclus may here be echoing.

²¹ On the essential immutability (τὸ ἀμετάβλητον, 97, 1) of the soul, see AUJOULAT, *Le Néoplatonisme Alexandrin*, 221–2, 246 and n. 110.

²² 99, 22–100, 1. For Hierocles (85, 19–86, 11) the three prominent virtues appear to be love, divine hope, and truth (*στοργή, θεία ἐλπίς, ἀλήθεια*), which result from toil, practice, and love (*πόνος, μελέτη, ἔρως*), activities recommended in the Pythagorean Verses. Cf. AUJOULAT, *Le Néoplatonisme Alexandrin*, 242–5.

²³ See e.g. 113, 15–21: αἱ γὰρ τῆς λογικῆς ψυχῆς καθάρσεις καὶ τοῦ αὐγοειδοῦς ὀχήματος

Not surprisingly, Hierocles refers to sacred rites and theurgical practices as the material means for the purification of the spiritual body²⁴. Thus, in view of the true man's double nature, Hierocles stresses that *katharsis* has a twofold domain: the rational soul is purified by the practice of the virtues, moral and intellectual – Hierocles recommends the mathematical sciences and dialectics –, and the luminous body by means of the hieratic ἀναγωγή, the lifting up of the soul through telestique purifications of the pneumatic vehicle²⁵. Incidentally, although Hierocles follows Iamblichus in advising the use of theurgy, he does not elevate it to the same heights as Iamblichus; this moderation may in part be explained by the restraining influence of the powerful Christian community in Alexandria: for the Christians theurgy was tantamount to magic, which had been officially forbidden since Constantine²⁶.

What is the ultimate fate of the vehicle? Porphyry had taught that the πνεῦμα-body was composed of elements from the planets; it served as the vehicle for the irrational part of the soul which is formed from the irrational powers in the cosmos as the soul descends through the celestial spheres. Consequently, in the return of the soul, both vehicle and irrational soul dissolve again into the cosmos²⁷. Iamblichus, on the other hand, had argued that the vehicle, having been created by the cosmic gods, remains ever attached to the irrational soul, and that both, though separated from the rational soul in the return to the One, are immortal²⁸. Proclus (after Syrianus) appears to have combined both positions by combining two vehicles: the first is immortal, having been created by the demiurge and made up of the 'highest points of the irrational life'; the second, which bears the irrational soul, is woven to the first by the lesser gods, but both it and the irrational soul are mortal²⁹.

προμηθοῦνται, ὅπως ἂν αὐταῖς ὑπόπτερον καὶ τοῦτο γένόμενον μὴ ἐμποδὼν ἴσθηται πρὸς τὴν ἄνω πορείαν. πτεροφυῖα δὲ αὐτοῦ ἀρίστη ἢ κατὰ μικρὸν μελέτη τῆς τῶν περιγεῖων ἀποστάσεως καὶ ὁ πρὸς τὴν αὐλίαν ἐθισμὸς καὶ ἡ ἀπόθεσις, ὧν ἂν ἐπλήσθη μολυσμῶν ἐκ τῆς πρὸς τὸ ὑλικὸν σῶμα συζεύξεως.

²⁴ See 113, 6–8: λείπεται δὴ οὗν ἡ τοῦ ψυχικοῦ σώματος κάθαρσις, ἣν ποιήσασθαι δεῖ τοῖς ἱεροῖς ἐπόμενον θεσμοῖς καὶ ταῖς τῶν ἱερῶν τέχναις. σωματικωτέρα δὲ πῶς αὕτη ἡ κάθαρσις. Cf. 111, 17–20.

²⁵ 112, 20–21, 116, 20–117, 5; thereto see AUJOUAT, *Le Néoplatonisme Alexandrin*, 246–9.

²⁶ On the topic of theurgy in Hierocles, see AUJOUAT, *Le Néoplatonisme Alexandrin*, 5, 207–11; in Iamblichus, see FINAMORE, *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle*, 125–55; on theurgy in Neoplatonism generally, see Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles* 21–45 passim and the titles given by S. I. JOHNSTON, *Hekate Soteira*, Atlanta 1990, 76 n. 1.

²⁷ The texts pertaining to the ὄχημα-πνεῦμα in Porphyry may be found in the excellent discussion by DEUSE, *Untersuchungen zur mittel- und neuplatonischen Seelenlehre*, 213–30.

²⁸ See *In Tim.* fr. 81 DILLON (*Iamblichi . . . fragmenta*) and commentary ad loc. (pp. 371–377); FINAMORE, *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle*, 17–27. On the creation of the vehicle by the cosmic gods (and not by the demiurge, contra FINAMORE, *ibid.*, 11–14), see W. DEUSE, *Gnomon* 59, 1987, 409–10.

²⁹ In *Tim.* iii 236, 31 ff. DIEHL (on ἀκρότητες τῆς ἀλόγου ζωῆς, see DILLON, *Iamblichi . . . fragmenta*, p. 374), *El. Th.* prop. 209 and DODDS ad loc. (pp. 306–8). Sometimes Proclus even

In comparison with these positions, Hierocles' conception is simple. The luminous body, created by the demiurge and eternally attached to the rational soul, is immortal (ἀθάνατος, 111, 2). In this Hierocles clearly follows the pattern of Iamblichus³⁰.

For Iamblichus, however, the vehicle was closely linked to the irrational soul, and though both might be increasingly purified (through theurgy), they do not enter the noetic realm³¹. Something similar obtains for Hierocles, even though his vehicle is the bearer of the rational soul. Hierocles explains that after a man has obtained truth and virtue in his soul, and his pneumatic vehicle is purified, 'he is united with the all and borne up towards God himself, but because he has a co-natural body, he requires a place in the order of the stars (εἰς κατάταξιν ἀστροειδῆ) . . .' (120, 1–3). The luminous body thus imposes a certain limitation on the upward movement of the soul. The vehicle returns the soul to its kindred star (ξύννομον ἄστρον)³², the location of which Hierocles designates precisely as in the free aether below the moon³³. He describes the aether as immaterial and eternal, thereby establishing an affinity between the immaterial luminous body and its place of residence. *Mutatis mutandis*, the influence of both Plato and Aristotle is patent. With the former it is of course his frequent use of astral imagery vis-à-vis the soul that reappears in Hierocles. In respect to Aristotle, it is not only his comparison of the substance of the stars to the fifth element, the aether, that Hierocles employs, but also perhaps Aristotle's theory of natural place³⁴. Hierocles is careful to show the *appropriateness* of the place to which the vehicle arrives. The purifications of the pneumatic vehicle, its separation from the non-life of matter, prepare it to enjoy, in a proper manner (ἐπιτηδείως), the fellowship of pure spirits (καθαρῶν πνευμάτων) and to sustain the company of aethereal bodies (117, 2–10).

The aetherial place to which the vehicle flies not only suits it then because of the similarity of composition but also because it is in fact the place of its primitive felicity (113, 11–13). Given Hierocles' strict notion of cosmic order (τάξις), it was an important point of doctrine with him that no being ever overstep its place within

speaks of a third vehicle – in reference to the visible body as the 'shell-like' (ὀστρεῖνος) body of the vegetative soul (In Remp. i 119, 4 KROLL, In Tim. iii 299, 25–6 DIEHL, ap. Oly. In Phd. 13. 3, 12 WESTERINK, cf. OLY. In Phd. 10. 5, 5 WESTERINK et al.; SORABJI, Matter, Space, and Motion, 107). For a comparison of Proclus and Iamblichus, see FINAMORE, Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle, 86–7.

³⁰ See HADOT, Le problème du néoplatonisme alexandrin, 102–5, who also shows the similarities of Hierocles' vehicle to that of Hermias (ibid., 105–6).

³¹ See FINAMORE, Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle, 145.

³² 99, 2 (cf. Plato, Tim. 43b4); this is a privilege denied to irrational animals, 51, 11.

³³ 120, 3–8; AUJOLAT, Le Néoplatonisme Alexandrin, 259.

³⁴ Cf. AUJOLAT, Le Néoplatonisme Alexandrin, 259–60. On Aristotle's account of natural place and the problems it raises, see SORABJI, Matter, Space, and Motion, 186ff.

the universal hierarchy. Therefore, although man's goal is assimilation with God, he could only ever achieve this likeness approximately and imperfectly. The very agent that enables man to purify his soul is also that which forever fixes him in an inferior rank in the divine order. While it is true that all rational, celestial creatures are in part composed of body, these have never fallen into generation (εἰς γένεσιν, 111, 3–12; 119, 21). Hence man, although rendered healthy and whole through the purification of the luminous body, nevertheless, for his final terminus merely regains his previous estate. To be sure, the aethereal realm is full of splendors; Hierocles calls it the Isles of the Blest, where the soul enjoys freedom from all earthly cares and, as far as man is able, knowledge of God, the demiurge. All the same, it remains a median realm, hence a subordinate position for the human soul. Hierocles is quite specific about this³⁵. So the reward of the virtuous soul, its final beatitude, is to be seen not as a promotion within the celestial hierarchy but rather as a restoration³⁶.

As the luminous body plays a median role in the drama of the soul, it can only restore the soul to a median place. Yet, even though Hierocles leads us to draw this correspondence, it would not be fair to his overall favorable valuation of the luminous body, if we were to leave it with the emphasis resting on its delimiting function. Therefore, to summarize, let me take the intermediate agency of the luminous body and accentuate its positive significance as a unifying factor in three regards. First, the luminous body unites the extremes in man, his preexistent rational soul with the irrational life of the perishable, material body, which he requires for his earthly sojourn. Secondly, the purification of the luminous body enables the soul to reunite with its kindred star and there to delight in its original

³⁵ Throughout the section describing the soul's final destination (119, 5–121, 18), Hierocles is at pains to note the restrictions that apply to man's apotheosis; his elevation to the gods is hampered by the appendage of the co-natural body as well as by the inescapable condition of his not being an immortal god by nature (οὐ φύσει ἀθάνατος θεός). On the designation of the aether as man's appropriate median place (τὸ μέσον αἰθέριον), which is set off from the higher celestial realm; see 21, 12–14. See further, AUJOLAT, *Le Néoplatonisme Alexandrin*, 258, 260; on man as a median being (μεσότης) and creature of the boundaries (μεθόριος), see *ibid.*, 170–4.

³⁶ Cf. KOBUSCH, *Studien zur Philosophie des Hierokles*, 120: 'Während nun der irdische Körper ... auf der Erde bleibt beim Aufstieg zum Göttlichen, wird dem Seelenvehikel der sublunare Bereich zugeordnet. Nur die Seele selbst erfährt die Apotheose'. One should not, however, make a too marked distinction between vehicle and soul. Certainly, insofar as the apotheosis of the soul consists in likeness to God, this can be experienced by the soul alone, and obviously not by the luminous body. But the soul's likeness to God still occurs at the same sublunary level at which it is retained by the luminous body, and, in the larger context (119, 12ff.) of the passage cited by KOBUSCH (120, 4), Hierocles makes little differentiation between the luminous body and the man who is brought to the sublunary realm by it and consequently made ἀθάνατος (though not by nature, see n. 35 above). Moreover, as AUJOLAT, *Le Néoplatonisme Alexandrin*, 247, points out, the luminous body, though distinct from the soul, is so important for Hierocles that he applies to it the expressions that Plato reserves for the soul.

proximity and likeness to God. For the third point, we need to recall that Hierocles, in common with Neoplatonic tradition, held the – to us rather strange – conviction that it was a mark of the true philosopher to reconcile the teachings of Plato and Aristotle³⁷; the doctrine of the ὄχημα-πεῦμα accordingly provided a fine vehicle (no pun intended) to evidence the doctrinal unity between the two great masters³⁸.

The invocation of Plato and Aristotle brings me to a final observation. It is generally fascinating to observe in Neoplatonic writings the transformation of what was originally, in Plato and Aristotle, metaphor, simile, or example, into vital components of nearly solidified doctrines³⁹. Platonic imagery and Aristotelean analogy came to be seen as practical, then necessary devices, and so eventually invested with their own reality. It was particularly Plato's vivid and striking imagery that attracted attention to itself and tended with later interpretators to take on a life of its own. This Neoplatonic trait is perhaps best exemplified in the doctrine of the vehicle of the soul.

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³⁷ De Prov., codex 214, 172a, 1–9, ap. Photius, Bibliothèque, iii, ed. HENRY, p. 126; codex 251, 461a, 30–39, id., vii, pp. 191–192. Hierocles credits Ammonius Saccas for having restored the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle to their purity and for having shown the unity of their thought; this information he may have derived from Porphyry, see HADOT, *Le problème du néoplatonisme alexandrin*, 67–76, esp. 73–6.

³⁸ Though this entailed certain problems; see AUJOUAT, *Le Néoplatonisme Alexandrin*, 269–85.

³⁹ There were, however, no clearly defined rules of symbolic interpretation; see J. DILLON, 'Image, Symbol and Analogy: Three Basic Concepts of Neoplatonic Allegorical Exegesis' in R. BAINE HARRIS, ed., *The Significance of Neoplatonism*, Albany, 1976, 247–62 = J. DILLON, *The Golden Chain*, Variorum reprints: Hampshire, Great Britain and Brookfield, Vermont, 1990, XXVIII.