One of the many aspects of Plato's teaching in which Plotinus discerns problems that need to be addressed is that of the relations of soul and body. I have in the recent past had occasion to address the question as to why Plato seems actually not to have regarded relations between soul and body as constituting a problem, but, if he himself did not, his successors, even from the period of the Old Academy—and of course including Aristotle—would appear to have done so.

Aristotle, after all, is trying to address this problem in the notable passage *Gen. an. 2.3 736B27 ff.*, where he produces the idea of a *symphyton pneuma*, composed of the same substance as the stars—that is to say, *aitheir*, the *pempton soma*—residing particularly in the blood around the heart, and serving as the conduit for impulses from the active intellect, via the passive intellect, to the body as a whole, and to its various organs. But even within the Academy, the admittedly somewhat maverick Heraclides of Pontus seems to have advanced the view that the soul is itself composed of *aitheir*, the same substance as the stars (*frgs. 98–99 Wehrli*). This is, we must grant, not the same thing as proposing a mediating entity between soul and body which would be composed of this substance, but it is evidence of speculation on the topic of soul-body relations, offering a solution which would obviate the need for any such mediating entity. It also, incidentally, shows the adoption of Aristotle's theory of *aitheir* as a fifth essence within the Academy itself, something which is also attested for Xenocrates (*frg. 53 Heinze/264–266 Isnardi Parente*)—though there is no evidence that Xenocrates proposed this as the substance of the soul.

At any rate, this is an issue that surfaces pretty early in the Platonic tradition, even if it did not bother Plato himself. To take something of a leap—but this is a regrettable function of the fragmentary state of our evidence—we find the concept of a "pneumatic vehicle" as a conduit between soul and

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*I am happy to offer this essay, albeit not strictly Gnostic in subject-matter, to an old friend, in token of his great contributions to our understanding of the Gnostic tradition, and thus to our appreciation of the milieu out of which Plotinus arises.*

1 Dillon 2009.
body well established in the Platonism of the second century CE. Galen, for a start, seems to take it for granted in a passage of his PHP 7.7 (p. 643 f. Müller), where he is criticising a theory of Posidonius which postulated a light-like \((\text{phōtoeides})\) pneuma as constituting the proper medium for the exercise of vision. Galen makes this the basis for a general comment about the nature of the soul, to the effect that we must accept either the Stoic and Aristotelian view of soul as a “luminous and aetherial body” \((\text{augoeides kai aetheriōdes sōma})\), or we may take the soul itself to be an incorporeal essence \((\text{asōmatos ousia})\), and postulate that the above-mentioned body is its “primary vehicle” \((\text{prōton ochēma})\), “through which as a medium it establishes communication with the rest of bodies.”

It is not quite clear whether Galen is adopting this theory himself, but it does not on the other hand sound as if he has invented it off the top of his head. There is further evidence, from (probably) the same period, in the pseudo-Plutarchan treatise De vita et poesi Homeri, the author of which is acquainted with philosophical trends, though without, it would seem, being a philosopher himself. In ch. 128 of the work, he reports it as the view of Plato and Aristotle that the soul at death takes with it to pneumatikon, “the pneumatic element,” which then serves as its “vehicle” \((\text{ochēma})\), implying that it already possessed this while it was in the body.

There is other evidence that the theory was known to Galen’s contemporary, the Pythagoreanizing Platonist Numenius \((\text{frg. 34 des Places, from Macrobius})\), and to the author(s) of the Chaldaean Oracles, which refer to the rarefied vehicle of the soul \((\text{psychēs lepton ochēma, frg. 120 des Places})\). On the whole, it seems most plausible that the theory of the \(\text{ochēma}\) was developed in Platonist circles of the early Roman Imperial period, in the generation or so after Antiochus of Ascalon (who was probably himself too much influenced by Stoicism to regard the soul as incorporeal), adapting Stoic theory of the soul as “intelligent fire” \((\text{pyr noeron})\) or pneuma, and com-

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2 I am ultimately indebted here to the succinct but most useful survey undertaken by Dodds in an appendix to his edition of Proclus’ Elements of Theology (1963, 313–321), himself indebted to Kissling 1922.

3 He is certainly sympathetic to Plato and Platonism, as well as to Pythagoras and Aristotle, but his stance is rather that of a well-educated member of the Second Sophistic than of a professional philosopher. Cf. the whole passage §§122–130, on Homer’s view of the soul.

4 In ch. 122, after commending the Pythagorean-Platonic doctrine of the immortality of the soul, he is prepared to state that “(Homer) knows well (as exemplified in the Nekyia of Od. 11) that blood is the food and nourishment of the pneuma, and pneuma is the soul, or the vehicle \((\text{ochēma})\) of the soul.”

5 SVF 2.774 = Diogenes Laërtius, Vit. phil. 7.156; SVF 2.885 = Galen, PHP 3.1 (p. 251 Müller).