

Porphyry's theory of soul (and its reception by Eusebius)

Handout

Main Points

- Porphyry distinguishes between the soul in itself and the soul in relation to the body (κατὰ σχέσιν; Porphyry, *On the Faculties of the Soul*, fr. 253.114-117 Smith)
- The soul in relationship is the soul that relates to, and animates the body, the embodied soul; the soul in itself is the intellect that does enter the body but does not engage with and does not animate the body (cf. T3, T4)
- This soul, the soul in itself, enters the human body only later in life. This is what Porphyry argues in his *Ad Gaurum*. Porphyry conceives of the soul strictly speaking as intellect also in *Against Boethus* (fr. 245.16 Smith; cf. fr. 244, *Ad Gaurum* ch.2, 17, T.9)
- The soul in relation, the embodied soul, is the *empsychia* (T6). Is this one that is poured into the body? (εἴσκρισις; *Ad Gaurum* 33.1; cf. T.9)

T1. διττῶς ἐπινοουμένης τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ ἐχούσης τὴν ζωὴν, τὴν τε καθ' αὐτὴν καὶ τὴν κατὰ σχέσιν, ἐν τῇ κατὰ σχέσιν ζωῇ ὑφίσταται τὰ μέρη. (Porphyry, *On the Faculties of the Soul* fr. 253.114-117 Smith=Stobaeus I.354.18)

Since the soul is conceived in two ways and as having life, the soul in itself and the soul in relation, the parts [of the soul] exist only in the life in relation.

T2. ὅταν γὰρ τὸ ζῶον αἰσθάνηται, ἔοικεν ἢ μὲν ψυχὴ ἀρμονία χωριστῇ ἐξ ἑαυτῆς τὰς χορδὰς κινούση ἡρμωσμένας ἀρμονία ἀχωρίστω, τὸ δὲ αἴτιον τοῦ κινήσαι, τὸ ζῶον, διὰ τὸ εἶναι ἔμψυχον ἀνάλογον τῷ μουσικῷ διὰ τὸ εἶναι ἐναρμόνιον, τὰ δὲ πληγέντα σώματα διὰ πάθος αἰσθητικὸν ταῖς ἡρμωσμέναις χορδαῖς. καὶ γὰρ ἐκεῖ οὐχ ἢ ἀρμονία πέπονθεν ἢ χωριστῇ, ἀλλ' ἢ χορδῇ. καὶ κινεῖ μὲν ὁ μουσικὸς κατὰ τὴν ἐν αὐτῷ ἀρμονίαν, οὐ μὴν ἐκινήθη ἂν ἢ χορδῇ μουσικῶς, εἰ καὶ ὁ μουσικὸς ἐβούλετο, μὴ τῆς ἀρμονίας τοῦτο λεγούσης. (Porphyry, *Sent.* 18; cf. Plotinus, *Enn.* III.6.4.41-45)

For when the living being experiences sense-perception, the soul becomes like a separate harmony which moves the strings all by itself, they being attuned by an inseparable harmony, while the cause of the motion, the living being, through its being ensouled, is analogous to the

musician by reason of being attuned, whereas the bodies which are brought into contact by the affection arising through sense perception are analogous to the harmonized strings; for in that case it is not the separate harmony that is affected but the string. And the musician initiates movement in accordance with the harmony that is in him, but the string would not be moved in a musical way, even if the musician wished it, if the harmony did not authorize this. (Dillon's trans.)

T3. Τὰ καθ' αὐτὰ ἀσώματα ὑποστάσει μὲν καὶ οὐσία οὐ πάρεστι οὐδὲ συγκίρνεται τοῖς σώμασι, τῇ δὲ ἐκ τῆς ῥοπῆς ὑποστάσει τινὸς δυνάμεως μεταδίδωσι προσεχοῦς τοῖς σώμασιν. ἢ γὰρ ῥοπή δευτέραν τινὰ δύναμιν ὑπέστησε προσεχῆ τοῖς σώμασιν. (Porphyry, *Sent.* 4)

Incorporeals in themselves are not present to bodies and do not mix with them in their reality and their essence, but rather in virtue of a reality generated by their *inclination* [ῥοπῆς] they impart a power which acts immediately upon bodies. For the inclination generates a secondary power which acts immediately upon bodies. (Dillon's trans. slightly modified)

T4. Τὸ ἀσώματον ἂν ἐν σώματι κατασχεθῆ, οὐ συγκλεισθῆναι δεῖ ὡς ἐν ζωγρείῳ θηρίον. συγκλείσει γὰρ αὐτὸ οὐδὲν οὕτω δύναται καὶ περιλαβεῖν σῶμα οὐδ' ὡς ἄσκος ὑγρὸν τι εἶργειν ἢ πνεῦμα, ἀλλ' αὐτὸ δεῖ ὑποστῆσαι δυνάμεις ῥέπουσας ἀπὸ τῆς πρὸς αὐτὸ ἐνώσεως εἰς τὸ ἔξω, αἷς δὴ κατιὸν συμπλέκεται τῷ σώματι. δι' ἐκτάσεως οὖν ἀρρήτου τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ἢ εἰς σῶμα σύνερξιν. (Porphyry, *Sent.* 28)

If the incorporeal entity is contained in a body, it should not be seen as being enclosed in it like a wild beast in a cage. For in fact no body can enclose and embrace it in the way that a bag contain some liquid or air, but rather we must suppose that it generates powers which incline from its self-directed unity towards what is external to it, by means of which it descends and is interwoven with the body. It is then by means of an ineffable extension of itself that its enclosure with the body comes about. (Dillon's trans.)

T5. Τὸ δὲ τῇ βαρύτητι ἀπεικάζειν τὴν ψυχὴν ἢ ποιότητι μονοειδέσι καὶ ἀκινήτοις σωματικῶς, καθ' ἃς ἢ κινεῖται ἢ ποιὸν ἐστὶ τὸ ὑποκείμενον, ἐκπεπτωκότος ἢ τέλεον ἢ ἐκόντος ἢ ἄκοντος τῆς ψυχικῆς ἀξίας καὶ οὐδαμῶς καθεωρακότος ὡς παρουσία μὲν τῆς ψυχῆς ζωτικὸν γέγονε τὸ τοῦ ζῶου σῶμα, ὡς πυρὸς παρουσία θερμὸν τὸ παρακείμενον ὕδωρ, ψυχρὸν ὄν καθ' ἑαυτό, καὶ ἡλίου ἀνατολῆς πεφώτισται γὰρ ὁ ἀήρ, σκοτεινὸς ὢν ἄνευ τῆς τούτου ἐκλάμψεως. Ἀλλ' οὕτε

ἡ θερμὴ τοῦ ὕδατος ἢ θερμότης ἦν τοῦ πυρὸς οὔτε τὸ πῦρ, οὔτε τὸ ἐναέριον φῶς τὸ σύμφυτον τῷ ἡλίῳ φῶς. ὡσαύτως δὲ οὐδὲ ἡ τοῦ σώματος ἐμψυχία, ἥτις ἔοικε τῇ βαρύτητι καὶ τῇ περὶ τὸ σῶμα ποιότητι, ἢ ψυχὴ ἢ ἐν σώματι καταταχθεῖσα, δι' ἣν καὶ πνοῆς τινος ζωτικῆς μετέσχε τὸ σῶμα. (Porphyry, *Against Boethus* fr. 248.12-15 Smith=Eusebius, *PE* 15.11.3)

To liken the soul to heaviness or to uniform bodily qualities which cannot be changed, according to which the subject either is moved or is of a certain sort, was the doctrine of one who, willingly or unwillingly, completely missed the true worth of soul and in no way saw that it is by the presence of soul, indeed, that the body of a living creature comes to be alive, as it is by the presence of fire that the adjacent water comes to be hot, being cold in itself, and by the rising of the sun that the air is illuminated, being dark without illumination by this. But the heat of the water is neither the heat of the fire, and the light in the air is not the light that is cognate to the sun. In just the same way the soul in the body, which is like the heaviness and the quality of the body, is not the soul that has been descended to the body, through which the body partook of life. (Sharples' trans. modified)

T6. καλῶς γὰρ καὶ τὸ αἰδίων προσέθεικεν ὡς ὁ Πλάτων τὸ ἀνώλεθρον ἐν τῷ Φαίδωνι, ἵνα μὴ ὡς ὁ Βόηθος οἰηθῶμεν τὴν ψυχὴν ὡσπερ τὴν ἐμψυχίαν ἀθάνατον μὲν εἶναι ὡς αὐτὴν μὴ ὑπομένουσαν τὸν θάνατον ἐπιόντα, ἐξισταμένην δὲ ἐπιόντος ἐκείνου τῷ ζῶντι ἀπόλλυσθαι (Porphyry, *Against Boethus*, not in Smith, quoted by [Simplicius], *In de anima* 247.23-26)

Aristotle rightly added the term “eternal”, as Plato in the *Phaedo* added the term “indestructible”, so that we should not, like Boethus, think that the soul is immortal in the same sense that the being-ensouled is, namely in the sense that it does not endure death when this comes but withdraws when death comes upon the living being and thus perishes. (Sharples trans. modified)

T7. ἐγὼ δὲ τοῦτο οὐκ εἰς ἄτοπον ἀναδειξάμενος συγχωρεῖν παραιτήσομαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἴ τι ἄλλο διαβεβαιοῦμαι, καὶ τὸν Πλάτωνα τοῦ λόγου ἐπαγόμενος μάρτυρα καὶ σὺν τούτῳ γε Ἀριστοτέλην, ὡς ὁπῆ νοῦς ἀνθρώποις παραγίνεται καὶ οὐδὲ πᾶσιν οὕτως, σπάνιος δὲ ὄτῳ ἐπιτηδεῖα ψυχὴ πρὸς νοῦ γίνεταί συνουσίαν. (Porphyry, *To Gaurus*, ch. 12, 3)

For my part I will not refuse my agreement to this doctrine by proclaiming its absurdity, but if there is anything I affirm strongly, I will call Plato and with him Aristotle, as witnesses to the

truth of this discourse: that intellect comes late to men, and not even in this way for all, but it is rare, and reserved for the person whose soul becomes appropriate for commerce with the intellect. (M. Chase trans.)

T8. ὥστε κᾶν αἴσθησιν ἔχη τὰ ἔμβρυα κατὰ Πλάτωνα κᾶν ὄρεξιν κᾶν ζῶα λέγεται, ἀλλ' ὁμωνύμως γε ἔχει ταῦτα καὶ λέγεται ζῶα, τοῖς μέντοι φυτοῖς συνωνύμως. (Porphyrus, *To Gaurus*, ch.4, 6, p. 39)

even if embryos have sensation and desire according to Plato, and are said to be living beings, yet they have these characteristics and are called living beings homonymously, but synonymously to plants...(M. Chase trans.)

T9. Ἡμεῖς τοίνυν προηγουμένως μὲν ἐπιδείξομεν ὅτι οὔτε ζῶον ἐνεργείᾳ τὸ κούμενον οὔτε δυνάμει ὡς τὸ ἤδη τὴν ψυχὴν δεδεγμένον, οἷς ἔπεται τὸ μετὰ τὴν ἀποκύησιν γίγνεσθαι τὴν εἴσκρισιν. καὶ συγχωρήσαντες δὲ τὸ δυνάμει ἢ καὶ ἐνεργείᾳ ζῶον εἶναι τὸ ἔμβρυον αὐτό, ἐροῦμεν ὡς οὐχ οἷόν τε οὔτ' οὖν ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς γεγονέναι τὴν ψύχωσιν οὔτ' οὖν ἀπὸ τῆς μητρὸς, ἀλλὰ μόνον ὡς ἔξωθεν. (Porphyrus, *To Gaurus*, ch. 2, 5)

For our part, we will demonstrate above all that the fetus is not an animal, either in act, or potentially in the sense of what has already received the soul, and that consequently the soul's entry takes place after birth. Even if we conceded that the embryo itself is an animal potentially, or even in act, we will maintain that it is not possible for ensoulment to take place from the father or the mother, but only from outside...(M. Chase trans.)

οὔτε ὁ πατήρ τὴν ψυχὴν ἐνδίδωσιν οὔτε ἡ μήτηρ, ὡς δὴ τι καὶ ἄλλο ἀγωνιεῖται. δῆλον γὰρ ὡς εἰ μὴ ἐκ τῶν γονέων ὅτι ἔξωθεν εἰσεκρίθη. (Porphyrus, *To Gaurus* ch. 17, 1)

that it is neither the father nor the mother who provides the soul, will be brought to issue, as will any other outstanding points. For it is clear that if the soul does not come from its parents, it has entered from without. (M. Chase trans.)

T.10 ἔξαπλοῖ δὲ τὴν διάνοιαν ὁ Πορφύριος ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ τῶν Πρὸς Βόηθον Περὶ ψυχῆς τοῦτον γράφων τὸν τρόπον.

Αὐτίκα λόγον ἰσχυρὸν εἶναι δοκοῦντα τῷ Πλάτωνι εἰς παράστασιν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀθανασίας, τὸν ἐκ τοῦ ὁμοίου. Εἰ γὰρ ὅμοια τῷ θείῳ καὶ ἀθανάτῳ καὶ ἀειδεῖ καὶ ἀσκεδάστῳ καὶ ἀδιαλύτῳ καὶ οὐσιωμένῳ καὶ συνεστώτι ἐν ἀφθαρσίᾳ, πῶς οὐ τοῦ γένους ἂν εἴη τοῦ κατὰ τὸ παράδειγμα; Καὶ ἐπειδὴ τῷ μὲν θνητῷ τε καὶ λυτῷ καὶ ἀνοήτῳ καὶ ζωῆς ἀμετόχῳ καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἀπτῷ τε καὶ αἰσθητῷ καὶ γινομένῳ καὶ ἀπολλυμένῳ οὐδαμῶς ἔοικε, τῷ δὲ θείῳ καὶ ἀθανάτῳ καὶ ἀειδεῖ καὶ νοερῷ ζῶντί τε καὶ ἀληθείας συγγενεῖ καὶ ὅσα ἐκεῖνος περὶ αὐτῆς ἀναλογίζεται, ἐδόκει μὴ τὰς μὲν ἄλλας ὁμοιότητος τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνεῖναι συγχωρεῖν, τὸ δὲ τῆς οὐσίας ἐμφορὸς ἀπ' αὐτῆς ἐθέλειν ἀθετεῖν, δι' ὃ καὶ τούτων αὐτὴν τυχεῖν συμβέβηκεν. (Porphyry, *Against Boethus* fr. 242 Smith=Eusebius, *PE* 11.27.20-11.28.5)

Porphyry explains the meaning [of *Phaedo* 79a-81c] in the first book of *Against Boethus* on the soul, writing as follows. Now an argument which seems to Plato to be powerful in establishing the immortality of the soul is the argument from similarity. For if the soul is similar to the divine and immortal and formless and undispersed and indissoluble and substantial and what exists indestructibly, how would it not belong to the kind of the exemplar?...

And since the soul is in no way like what is mortal and soluble and lacking intelligence and with no share in life, and for this reason tangible and perceptible and subject to coming to be and passing away but like what is divine and immortal and formless and intelligent and living and akin to truth, and all the things that [Plato] reckoned up concerning it, it seemed right not to be willing, while allowing that the other similarities to god were in it, to remove from it the likeness to substance, on account of which it resulted that it possesses these. (Sharples' trans.)

T11. And continuing he says: [Porphyry]: For it the soul is shown to be most similar of all things to god, what need is there still of other arguments, having made this prelude to show its immortality, and not counting this as one argument among many, since it is sufficient to persuade those of good judgement that it would not share in the activities that are divine if it were not also divine itself? For if, although it is bound in what is mortal and soluble and lacking intelligence and is itself a dead body and always perishing and flowing away into the transformation of destruction, it still fashions it and holds it together and displays its own divine substance, although it is obstructed and impeded by the utterly ruinous image that has been added to it -how, if it is separated from the irrational, like gold that has been covered in mud, would it not there and then display its own form as being like god alone, and also participating in him, preserving the similarities in its activities and in its most mortal state, as when it is

confined in what is mortal, not being dissolved on account of this, because it is of a nature that has no share in destruction? (Porphyry *Against Boethus* fr. 244 Smith=Eusebius, *PE* 11.28.11-12)

T12. And further down he [Porphyry] says: Reasonably it seems both divine, from its similarity to what is without parts and mortal from its affinity to mortal nature; and it descends and ascends and is of mortal forms and like the immortals. For even the one who fills his belly and is eager to be sated like the beasts is a human being; so too is the one who can save a ship in peril on the sea through his knowledge and can save in diseases...And what has he not contrived, displaying the intellect in him which is divine and equal to god? As a result of this, displaying the daring of what is Olympian and divine and in no way mortal he persuaded the majority who on account of their self-love are not able to see into the depths, to think from what appears externally that he is of mortal form in the same way as them. (Porphyry, *Against Boethus* fr. 245=Eusebius, *PE* 11.28.13-15; Sharples' trans.)

T13. Τὸ μὲν οὖν γινώσκειν ἑαυτὸν τὴν ἀναφορὰν ἔοικεν ἔχειν ἐπὶ τὸ γινώσκειν δεῖν τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ τὸν νοῦν, ὡς ἐν τούτῳ ἡμῶν οὐσιωμένων. (Porphyry, *On Knowing Yourself*, fr. 275.22-24 Smith= Stobaeus 3.582.13-16,)

Knowing yourself seems to refer to having to know the soul, that is, the intellect, since this is our essence.

T14. Πρὸς δὲ τὸν ἐντελέχειαν τὴν ψυχὴν εἰπόντα καὶ ἀκίνητον παντελῶς οὐσαν κινεῖν ὑπειληφότα ρητέον πόθεν οἱ ἐνθουσιασμοὶ τοῦ ζῴου μηδὲν μὲν ξυνιέντος ὧν ὄρα τε καὶ λέγει, τῆς δὲ ψυχῆς καὶ τὸ μέλλον καὶ μὴ ἐνεστῶς βλεπούσης καὶ κατὰ ταῦτὸ κινουμένης, πόθεν δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς τοῦ ζῴου συστάσεως αἱ τῆς τοῦ ζῴου βουλαὶ τε καὶ σκέψεις καὶ θελήσεις, ῥοπαὶ οὐσαί τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ οὐ τοῦ σώματος. (Porphyry, *Against Boethus* fr. 247 Smith=Eusebius, *PE* 15.11.1)

Against the one who said that the soul is and actuality and who supposed that, being altogether unmoved, it causes movement, one should say, where does inspiration come from, when the living creature understands nothing of what it sees and says, but the soul sees what is future and not present and is moved in a corresponding way? From where, in the case of the living creatures' own constitution too, [come] the deliberations and considerations and wishes of the soul as belonging to the living creature, which are inclinations of the soul and not of the body? (Sharples' trans.)

T15. Τὰ μὲν οὖν ἄλλα ὅσα περὶ αὐτῆς εἰρήκασιν ἄλλοι, αἰσχύνῃν ἡμῖν φέρει. Πῶς γὰρ οὐκ αἰσχρὸς ὁ ἐντελέχειαν τιθεὶς τὴν ψυχὴν λόγος ‘σώματος φυσικοῦ ὀργανικοῦ’; πῶς δὲ οὐκ αἰσχύνῃς γέμων ὁ πνεῦμά πως ἔχον αὐτὴν ἀποδιδούς ἢ πῦρ νοερόν, τῇ περιψύξει καὶ οἶον βαφῆ τοῦ ἀέρος ἀναφθὲν ἢ στομωθὲν, ὃ τε ἀτόμων ἄθροισμα θεὶς ἢ ὅλως ἀπὸ σώματος αὐτὴν γεννᾶσθαι ἀποφαινόμενος; ὃν δὴ λόγον ἐν Νόμοις ἀσεβῶν ἀσεβῆ εἶναι ἀπερήνατο. αἰσχύνῃς οὖν πάντα οὗτοι πλήρεις λόγοι. ἐπὶ δὲ τῷ λέγοντι αὐτοκίνητον οὐσίαν οὐκ ἂν τις, φησὶν, αἰσχυνθεῖη. (Eusebius *Preparatio Evangelica* 15.11.4; Porphyry fr. 249 Smith/Atticus fr. 7bis Des Places)

The other things which other people say about it make us ashamed. For how is the account not shameful which makes the soul the actuality of an organic natural body? How is [the account] not full of shame which states that it is pneuma in a certain state, or intelligent fire, kindled or tempered by the chilling and as it were immersion in the air, and the one which makes it a collection of atoms or in a general that declares that it is produced from the body? [Plato] showed in the *Laws* that this is the impious argument of impious people. So all these accounts are full of shame. But no-one would be ashamed of the one that says that it is self-loved. (Sharples' trans.)

Eusebius' heading in the above passage is Πορφυρίου περὶ τοῦ αὐτοῦ (*PE* 15.11), which refers to the previous heading on Plotinus, Περί ἀθανασίας τῆς ψυχῆς πρὸς Ἀριστοτέλην ἐντελέχειαν τὴν ψυχὴν εἶναι φήσαντα (*PE* 15.10). Eusebius implies that Porphyry has the same target as Plotinus. But Plotinus targets Aristotle, while Porphyry targets Boethus. More importantly, Plotinus rejects Aristotle's doctrine of *entelecheia*, while Porphyry accepts it for the *empsychia* and rejects it for the soul in itself. Ms. Ib adds ἀπὸ τὸ πρὸς Βόηθον περὶ ψυχῆς.

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