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Hermias on the Vehicle of the Soul

John F. Finamore

In an article on the doctrine of the vehicle of the soul in the writings of the Neoplatonic philosophers Synesius, Hierocles, Proclus, and Hermias, Aujoulat argued that Hermias' doctrine differed from those of Proclus.¹ If this were true, one would expect to find in Hermias' commentary psychological doctrines at variance with the Procline/Syriatic view. In this paper I will test this hypothesis and argue that there is no significant difference between the doctrines of Syrianus/Proclus and Hermias.

The question of the degree of originality of Hermias' commentary has been a topic in a long debate.² Damascius (c. 458-c. 538 C.E.), who studied under Hermias and Hermias' sons Ammonius and Heliodoros, takes a rather dim view of his former teacher, writing that, although he was a diligent worker, "he was not exceedingly keen-minded, nor was he a discoverer of demonstrative arguments or a noble seeker of truth" (*Philosophical History* Fr. 54.9-11 Athanassiadi).³ For Damascius, Hermias was in no way an original thinker.⁴ Zeller and Praechter believed that Hermias was merely copying what Syrianus had said,⁵ and most modern scholars have followed their lead. More recently, scholars such as Moreschini and Bernard have argued that there is more originality in the commentary than has been thought.⁶ Most

¹ Aujoulat (1991).

² On this topic, see especially Baltly and Share (2018) 10-16.

³ All translations are my own.

⁴ Moreschini (1992) 452 argues that even if we should take Damascius' statement with a grain of salt, Damascius is not speaking about Hermias as a writer but rather as a teacher. I am not convinced that such a distinction can be maintained, especially since Damascius (however prejudiced he might have been) is nonetheless referring to Hermias' intellectual abilities generally and so would include his written works.

⁵ Zeller (1865) 747-50; Praechter (1912).

⁶ Moreschini (2009) 521-2; Bernard (1995) 220-224. See also Roskam (2014) 184 note 25 and Longo (2005) 47-48 note 42. For arguments against Moreschini and Bernard, see especially Manolea (2004) 50-59. For further background and texts, see Di Pasquale Barbanti (1998) 217-218 note 27.

recently, Baltzly and Share have argued that the question is insoluble for several reasons, most especially because we do not possess other works of Hermias to which to compare any doctrines that might be his in the *Phaedrus* commentary. They do state, however, that parts of the commentary can be compared to Syrianus' doctrines known from his *Metaphysics* commentary and from Proclus' allusions to Syrianus' doctrines.⁷ In what follows, I will use Proclus' writings to show that the doctrine of the vehicle is common to Syrianus, Proclus, and Hermias.

The doctrine of the two vehicles of the soul

The doctrine of the vehicle's soul is one that provoked disagreement among Neoplatonists. Porphyry thought that the soul's vehicle was an assortment of envelopes collected from the cosmos as the rational soul descended through the cosmos to its life in a mortal body on earth. For Porphyry, the soul vehicle was temporary, and the envelopes were returned to their original places in the cosmos during the soul's re-ascend. Iamblichus objected and argued instead that the vehicle was an ethereal body fashioned by the Demiurge and thus was immortal. It accompanied the rational soul on its descent to and ascent from the realm of generation. Syrianus, as Proclus tells us, took a different position. For him there were two separate vehicles. One was ethereal and immortal, and the other was made of elemental envelopes collected during descent and sloughed off during ascent.⁸

It has been argued that Hermias accepted Syrianus' position on the vehicle. Sarah Klitenic Wear,⁹ has compared a section of Hermias' commentary (135.14-138.9) with Proclus' works, especially the commentary to the *Timaeus*, and has shown that the Alexandrine philosopher accepts the two-vehicle doctrine of Syrianus. I have also argued for a close connection between Hermias' doctrine of the

⁷ Baltzly and Share (2018) 12-16. Taormina (2012) presents an interesting case in which Proclus maintains a theory of transmigration into animals that differs from that of Syrianus and Hermias. This would be an example of the unity of Hermias and his master's thought against an early doctrine of Proclus in the *Republic* commentary.

⁸ Proclus, *In Tim.* III.234.9-238.26. For the differing doctrines of the vehicle of the soul, see Finamore (1985), especially 11-27 and 168-169 and Di Pasquale Barbanti (1998) 228-237.

⁹ Wear (2019) esp. 107-110.

pneumatic (or lower, mortal) vehicle of the soul with that of Syrianus and Proclus.¹⁰

Why, then, does Aujoulat believe that Hermias' doctrine is original? His thesis is tied in with the philosophy of Hierocles and Synesius and the role of daemons therein. Aujoulat calls Hermias' doctrine "an example of originality."¹¹ The originality of the doctrine, however, is limited. Aujoulat is comparing the doctrine of the vehicle in Hierocles and Hermias. Aujoulat claims that Hierocles considers the vehicle a mean between the immaterial rational soul and the corporeal body, whereas Hermias considers it a mean between gods and human souls.¹² Aujoulat is not comparing Hermias to Proclus and Syrianus. It remains to be seen whether or not Hermias' position is original with regard to these two Neoplatonists.

The vehicle and the soul's descent and reascent

Hermias conducts a brief discussion of the rational soul and its vehicle at 135.14-138.9. As Wear shows,¹³ Hermias has two concerns. One is to disagree with the Iamblichean thesis that the soul in its descent and ascent changes not only in its powers and activities but in its very essence as well. This doctrinal difference with Iamblichus began with Syrianus and is held also by Proclus, and so we again find Hermias in agreement with Syrianus. The second issue with which Hermias is concerned is the role of the vehicle in the descent and ascent.¹⁴ According to Proclus, the rational soul in its pure, disembodied state, dwells in its immortal ethereal vehicle. It is this vehicle that allows the soul to embark on its connate star, its ethereal vehicle attached to the star's ethereal vehicle. The pneumatic vehicle, being made up of envelopes from the four elements, is mortal and makes the soul a citizen of the cosmos, allowing it to descend to the

¹⁰ Finamore (2019) 44-47.

¹¹ Aujoulat (1991) 309: "trait d'originalité."

¹² Aujoulat (1991) 309. The distinction that Aujoulat creates is ephemeral, however. The two vehicles are intermediaries in both senses. The vehicles carry the rational soul (which is completely without body) through the cosmos to the corporeal body, but they also provide the means of conveyance between embodied human souls on their ascent to the gods. Indeed, the two properties are the same, the one seen as the soul descends and the other as it ascends again.

¹³ Wear (2019) 101.

¹⁴ For what follows, see Finamore (2019) 44-47.

Moon and below. Finally, that pneumatic vehicle takes on the corporeal body, allowing the person to live a life on earth. All three entities (both vehicles and the corporeal body) are present in Hermias' account.¹⁵

Beginning at 136.18, Hermias interprets *Phaedrus* 246c2-4:

[The soul] that has shed its wings is carried along until it takes hold of something solid, where it settles and takes on an earthy body. (ἡ δὲ πτερορρυήσασα φέρεται ἕως ἂν στερεοῦ τινοῦ ἀντιλάβηται, οὗ κατοικισθεῖσα, σῶμα γῆινον λαβοῦσα.)

According to Hermias, this solid, earthy body is the corporeal body and not the immortal vehicle, which is not three-dimensional but rather two-dimensional because it is a subtle, immaterial body (being ethereal and so without the depth of corporeal objects).¹⁶ Thus, Hermias says, we should take care not to pollute the immortal vehicle with matter (136.29-30):

[Plato] advises us not to deepen the two-dimensional [vehicle]¹⁷ and not to make it earthy and wet¹⁸ through [living] a base life. (παρακελεύεται μὴ βαθύνειν τὸ ἐπίπεδον καὶ ποιεῖν αὐτὸ γεῶδες καὶ ἔνικμον διὰ τῆς ῥυπαρᾶς ζωῆς).

Thus, the soul's descent is brought on by a desire for materiality caused by base living. Hermias contrasts the human soul's desire for a corporeal body with the pure relationship between the gods and their ethereal bodies (which would, of course, be like the relationship of the good soul with its vehicle).¹⁹

¹⁵ For the doctrine of Syrianus and Proclus, see Proclus, *In Tim.* III. 236.31-238.26, 284.16-285.16, and 297.21-299.4. For more on the three "bodies," see Finamore (forthcoming).

¹⁶ See also Aujoulat (1991) 304-305 and Wear (2019) 107-108. For the Pythagorean sense of the word ἐπίπεδον, see Majercik (1989) 181.

¹⁷ Fr. 104 of the *Chaldaean Oracles*.

¹⁸ For moisture being the cause of heaviness and descent, see 166.15-18, where Hermias explains that Plato calls the descending souls "below the surface" (ὑποβρύχιαι, *Phdr.* 248a7) because they are either dragged down by their desire for the realm of generation or their vehicle has become wet (τοῦ ὀχήματος λουπὸν ἐνίκμου γενομένου, 166.16-17).

¹⁹ Wear (2019) 108 points out that Hermias' interpretation is similar to Proclus' in *In Tim.* III.320.14ff.

Hermias reiterates this point at 138.2-9, where he states that the ethereal vehicles of the planetary gods run easily (εὐτροχα, 138.2) and are attached from eternity in a most appropriate fashion to the gods' souls (τὰ ἐξηρητημένα σώματα αὐτὰ δι' ἐπιτηδειότητα προσεληλυθέναι ταῖς ἀστρώαις ψυχαῖς ἐξ αἰδίου, 3-4). In the case of the gods, the soul does not go to the body (i.e., to the gods' vehicle) and give itself, as our souls do, for the completion of life (138.4-6). Plato had written that we imagine the gods as eternally joined together with their bodies (*Phdr.* 246c7-d2, τὸν αἰεὶ δὲ χρόνον ταῦτα συμπεφυκότα). Hermias explains (138.6-9):

For the term “joined together” (συμπεφυκότα) demonstrates this point. For the bodies of the gods do not have a life that is acquired, as ours are, but rather they possess a connate life that is essentially connected to them from eternity. (οὐ γὰρ ὥσπερ τὰ ἡμέτερα σώματα ἐπίκτητον ἔχει τὴν ζωὴν, οὕτω καὶ τὰ θεῖα, ἀλλ' ἔχει ἐξ αἰδίου συνουσιωμένην ἑαυτοῖς σύμφυτον ζωὴν.)

Thus, whereas we human beings do have an intimate relationship with our ethereal vehicles that is similar to that of the gods with theirs, our connection to the body is not the same. It separates us from what we essentially are, rather than bringing us closer to it. Thus the gods have no descent and passions, but we do.²⁰

Daemons and the vehicle

So far we have seen that Hermias' does adopt a doctrine of the vehicle. A problem that arises, however, is that nowhere in the commentary does Hermias use the term “pneumatic vehicle;” he does not even use the adjective “pneumatic.” He does, however, make use of the word *pneuma*, and that noun refers to the second vehicle, as we shall see. The problem of Hermias' doctrine comes to a head in the role of the vehicle in Hermias' demonology.

²⁰ Cp. *In Phdr.* 150.21-151.10, where Hermias contrasts the ethereal vehicles of the gods, which easily ascend into the Intelligible, with ours, which can become heavy and weigh us down so that we instead descend into generation. He differentiates the ethereal vehicle (the chariot in the myth) from the recalcitrant horse, which he interprets as a faculty that drives us toward the realm of generation (ἡ γενεσιουργὸς ἐν ἡμῖν δύναμις, 151.6-7). In Platonic terms, this would be the irrational soul; for Proclus, the beginnings of the irrational soul are housed in the pneumatic vehicle. For Proclus, see *In Tim.* III.236.31-237.31 (discussed below).

Daemons come into the picture in the *Phaedrus* because Socrates mentions at 242b8-c3 that he was restrained from leaving Phaedrus by his daimonion:

When I was about to cross the river, my good fellow, [I became aware of] the daimonion (the sign accustomed to be present to me), for it always holds me back from what I am about to do, and I seemed to hear a certain voice on this very spot, which does not allow me to go away until I make expiation because I have offended in some way against a divine being. (‘Ηνίκ’ ἔμελλον, ὠγαθέ, τὸν ποταμὸν διαβαίνειν, τὸ δαιμόνιον τε καὶ τὸ εἰωθὸς σημεῖόν μοι γίγνεσθαι ἐγένετο--ἀεὶ δέ με ἐπίσχει ὃ ἂν μέλλω πράττειν--καὶ τινα φωνὴν ἔδοξα αὐτόθεν ἀκοῦσαι, ἢ με οὐκ ἐᾷ ἀπιέναι πρὶν ἂν ἀφοσιώσωμαι, ὡς δὴ τι ἡμαρτηκότα εἰς τὸ θεῖον.)

This mention of Socrates’ daimonion leads Hermias to discuss the role of daemons in Neoplatonic metaphysics and to explain why the daimonion prevents actions and how it does so (69.28-74.16).

The topic of the daimonion is common in the Platonic tradition. Plutarch of Chaeroneia, Apuleius of Madaura, and Maximus of Tyre all wrote treatises about the daimonion, and there are similarities between their treatises and Hermias’ account.²¹ To begin with, the daimonion is identified as Socrates’ personal daemon. Such a daemon makes an appearance in both the Myth of Er in the *Republic* (620d6-e1), where Lachesis assigns the daemon to each soul who has just chosen a life, and also in the *Phaedo* myth, where Plato says that this daemon leads the soul that has just arrived in Hades to the place of judgment (107d5-e1). Hermias writes that not all have knowledge of their guardian daemon, but Socrates of course does. Thus Socrates knew that his daemon worked for his benefit by dissuading him from certain courses of action.

The crucial problem that arises for Hermias in the Platonic text is that Socrates *hears* the voice of the daemon. Since daemons, unlike human beings, do not have sense organs including the organ of speech, how can Socrates hear them speak? Hermias embarks upon a response to

²¹ See Apuleius, *On the God of Socrates* XIII.147-XX.167; Plutarch, *De Genio Socratis* 579D-582C; Maximus of Tyre, *Dissertationes* VIII and IX. For these Middle Platonic accounts of the daimonion specifically and of demonology generally, see Finamore (2014). For Hermias’ demonology, see Manolea (2014) 74-76 and Moreschini (2019) 160-165. For the topic in Proclus, see Addey (2014).

this question at 72.26. In cases of human perception, he says, two events occur: our sense organs are affected in some way and we ourselves have knowledge or awareness (γνώσις αὐτοῦ τοῦ πάθους, 72.28-29) of this affection as it occurs.²² In the case of daemons and the other superior classes (angels, heroes, etc.) there is no affection of the body since there is no sense organ, but there is knowledge (72.29-73.1). Hermias gives also the specific example of the Sun, and here he brings in the god's vehicle (73.1-6):

And one must say that the body of the Sun does not perceive through affections (for the discussion concerns perception, and perception [takes place] around bodies) but is capable of knowing [what is perceived] wholly through its whole body; its sight is holistic and its hearing is holistic. Whenever our vehicle too, being radiant and pure after its separation from this [corporeal] body, is capable of perceiving wholly through its whole self, it both sees holistically and hears holistically. (Καὶ ρητέον ὅτι διὰ μὲν πάθους οὐκ αἰσθάνεται τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ἡλίου (περὶ γὰρ αἰσθήσεως ὁ λόγος, ἡ δὲ αἴσθησις περὶ σῶμα), ἀλλὰ ὅλον δι' ὅλου ἐστὶ γνωστικὸν καὶ ὅλον ὄψις ἐστὶν καὶ ὅλον ἀκοή, ὁπότε καὶ ἡμῶν μετὰ τὴν ἀπαλλαγὴν τοῦ σώματος τούτου τὸ ὄχημα λαμπρὸν ὄν καὶ καθαρὸν ὅλον δι' ὅλου ἐστὶν αἰσθητικὸν καὶ κατὰ πᾶν ὄρᾳ καὶ κατὰ πᾶν ἀκούει.)

Hermias' point is that since the gods and superior classes do not have sense organs or corporeal bodies, they (unlike us when we are embodied) do not receive sense information in separate packets (sight data from here, hearing data from there, etc.) but rather have a holistic method of perception. Indeed, it is not really perception at all, and so Hermias uses terms for knowing (γνώσις, γνωστικός). This is especially relevant in the case of the Sun, who (Proclus informs us) as an encosmic god has no pneumatic vehicle but only an ethereal one.²³

²² *In Phdr.* 72.26-29: ἐφ' ἡμῶν ὅταν δι' αἰσθήσεως γινώσκωμεν, δύο συμβαίνει καὶ πάθος περὶ αἰσθητήριον ἡμῶν οἷον περὶ τὴν κόρην ἢ περὶ ἄλλο τι αἰσθητήριον, καὶ γνώσις αὐτοῦ τοῦ πάθους.

²³ See Proclus, *Platonic Theology* III.5, 18-19, where he (most probably following Syrianus) posits that gods have only the ethereal vehicle, the superior classes have both the ethereal and pneumatic vehicles, and human souls have both as well as a corporeal body. See the notes of Saffrey and Westerink (2003) 113-114. They compare Proclus' doctrine here with that of *In Tim.* 296.7-299.9. For Proclus on these three bodies, see Finamore (2018), Chlup (2012) 104-105, and Siorvanes (1996) 131-133.

Thus, his “perception” is a species of γνῶσις, a taking in as a unitary whole of what to us is partial and fragmented. This is akin to what we human souls can do when we separate from our bodies (after death or in a theurgic ritual): ascending to Intellect in our ethereal vehicle and seeing things as they are as a whole all at once. As Baltzly and Share note, the epithets “radiant and pure” make clear that we are talking about a soul that is fully purified from its corporeal and pneumatic bodies.²⁴ Thus, the gods always and we sometimes transcend perception as a means of understanding what embodied souls perceive.

Having now explained how the superior classes receive perceptions, Hermias goes on to explain how they transmit perceptible messages to us. He begins by stating that they do not produce our sort of speech because they have no speech organs or need of a physical medium (such as air or water) to carry the sounds (73.12-14). Just as their perception differed from ours, being a kind of knowing rather than a being affected (γνωστικὸν καὶ οὐ παθητικὸν, 73.14-15), so too their means of transmitting the message must differ from ours. Hermias compares their messages to the Sun’s heat (73.16-20):

For it is transmitted by them in one way, but the recipient receives it in another. Just as although the Sun itself does not cause burning but has a heat in it that is life-giving, life-engendering, and mild, the air receives light from it by being affected and burned, so also although there is a certain harmony and a different kind of voice in them, we hear it by being affected. (Ἄλλως γὰρ παρ' αὐτῶν ἐνδίδοται, καὶ ἄλλως τὸ μεταλαμβάνον δέχεται. Ὡσπερ αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἡλίου μὴ ὄντος καυστικοῦ, ἀλλ' οὔσης ζωτικῆς καὶ ζωοποιοῦ θέρμης ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ ἀπλήκτου, ὁ ἀῆρ παθητικῶς δέχεται τὸ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ φῶς καὶ καυστικῶς· οὕτως οὖν ἁρμονίας οὔσης ἐν αὐτοῖς τινὸς καὶ ἐτέρου εἶδους φωνῆς ἡμεῖς παθητικῶς ἀκούομεν.)

The analogy presents a case of a substance (the Sun) that is in its essence supportive of life and gentle but is received in the corporeal world as burning and destructive. Just as the Sun’s light is not actually destructive but is altered by the recipient, so too the daemon’s voice is not really a voice but is perceived as such by the recipient. Making use of this difference between what is sent and how it is received, Hermias turns to the case of the daemonic voice and how we “hear” it (73.20-25):

²⁴ Baltzly and Share (2018) 227 note 537.

We certainly do not hear them with these perceiving ears nor do we see the daemonic and divine visions with these perceiving visual organs and eyes, but since there are in the pneuma [i.e., in the pneumatic vehicle²⁵] senses that are more akin to basic principles and more paradigmatic and purer than these senses [in the body], it is clear that the soul both sees and hears the divine images through these. (ἀκούομεν δὲ οὐ δήπου τούτοις τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς ὡσιν, οὐδὲ ταύταις ταῖς ὄψεσι καὶ τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς τὰς δαιμονίας καὶ θείας ὄψεις ὀρῶμεν, ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴ πασῶν τούτων τῶν αἰσθήσεων εἰσιν αἰσθήσεις ἀρχοειδέστεραι καὶ παραδειγματικώτεραι καὶ καθαρώτεραι ἐν τῷ πνεύματι, δηλονότι κατὰ ταύτας καὶ ἀκούει καὶ ὀρᾷ ἢ ψυχὴ τὰ θεῖα φάσματα.)

As Proclus tells us (*In Tim.* III.236.31-237.31), the soul's ethereal vehicle has the beginnings or "pinnacles" (ἀκρότητες, 236.32) of the irrational faculties, while the these ἀκρότητες are stretched out and divided (ἐκτεινομένης καὶ μεριζομένης, 237.2) in the pneumatic vehicle. Daemons and human souls share these pneumatic traces of irrational faculties (237.10-18), but we are more actively involved with our pneumatic vehicle in the irrational life (237.18-22). Proclus concludes (237.24-31):

The one unaffected sense in that [ethereal vehicle] generates one affected sense in the pneumatic vehicle, and this generates many affected ones in the oyster-like body; the one desiderative faculty in that [ethereal vehicle] brings forth many desiderative faculties in the pneuma that are separate from the oyster-like body²⁶ and capable of being educated, and these [faculties bring forth] the final enhylic ones in this [corporeal] body.

(ἢ δ' οὖν ἐν ἐκείνῳ μία αἰσθησις καὶ ἀπαθὴς ἐν τῷ πνευματικῷ ὀχήματι μίαν αἰσθησιν ἀπογεννᾷ παθητικὴν, αὕτη δὲ τὰς ἐν τῷ ὀστρεώδει σώματι πολλὰς καὶ παθητικὰς, καὶ ἢ ἐν ἐκείνῳ μία δύναμις ὀρεκτικὴ τὰς ἐν τῷ πνεύματι παρήγαγε πλείους ὀρεκτικὰς δυνάμεις ἐχούσας τι χωριστὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ ὀστρεώδους σώματος καὶ παιδεύεσθαι δυναμένης, αὗται δὲ τὰς ἐν τῷδε τῷ σώματι τελευταίας καὶ ἐνύλους.)

²⁵ Baltzly and Share (2018) 227 note 537.

²⁶ For this term for the corporeal body, see Plato's *Phaedrus* 250c6.

Thus what is single and unaffected at the highest level is altered by the recipient pneumatic body to be affected but single; this in turn is altered by the corporeal body to become multiple and affected. The faculty in the pneumatic vehicle, as Hermias explains, is a more fundamental, purer kind of sense. Unlike perception that takes place in the ethereal vehicle, the awareness here is still partly piecemeal (we are aware of a voice and we are aware of a vision) and partly unified (a single perception), but it nonetheless differs from the multiple corporeal perceptions. It is these pneumatic senses that allow us to receive the messages from the superior classes.

Thus far, the matter seems simple enough. The superior classes send ultra-sensible messages to the human soul, which the soul's pneumatic vehicle receives and interprets. But, as anyone who studies the later Neoplatonists knows, answers are seldom this simple. And Hermias is about to complicate the matter, as he must do if he is going to explain the role of both vehicles.²⁷ It is necessary that both vehicles play a role. He writes (73.28-74.2):

For a community between the daemonic vehicle and that of the soul comes about, according to which the daemonic vehicle, not making use of a tongue or vocal organs but by the very will of the soul of the daemon, sends out a certain motion, a harmonious meaningful sound,²⁸ which the human soul perceives by a

²⁷ The complication caused problems for Baltly and Share's interpretation of this section of the commentary. In the passage I am about to quote (73.28-74.2), they (2018) 227 note 537 think that the reference to the *pneuma* here is actually to the luminous (i.e., ethereal) vehicle in 74.2 and that therefore there are not two vehicles in Hermias' system, but one only. This would make Hermias' doctrine more like Iamblichus'. There is no need for such concern, however. The sensations that are expressed in the comparative form above ("more akin to basic principles and more paradigmatic and purer") represents not a fully purified intellectual capacity (as would be the case in an ethereal vehicle) but merely one that is purer and more universal than one that is divided in the realm of nature. It is, in short, the kind that would appear in the pneumatic vehicle. As Baltly and Share also admit, there is evidence for both the ethereal and the pneumatic vehicles elsewhere in Hermias' commentary (78.33-79.2). See their note 573 on page 231.

²⁸ The "harmonious sound" (ἐναρμόνιον ἦχον) mirrors the ἀρμονία of 73.19. This is not an aural sound, of course, but most probably represents the numerical ratios existent in *cosmos*, i.e., the harmony as a reflection of the attunement of the universe to our souls. The fully purified soul, now attuned to its *symbola* (and, as it were, at the right frequency level to receive divine messages), comes to know the messages from the daemon.

perception in its luminous vehicle. (Κοινωνία γὰρ γίνεται τοῦ δαιμονίου ὀχήματος καὶ τοῦ τῆς ψυχῆς· ὅπερ δαιμόνιον ὄχημα, οὐχὶ γλώττη χρώμενον καὶ φωνητικοῖς ὀργανοῖς, ἀλλ' αὐτῷ τῷ βούλεσθαι τὴν τοῦ δαίμονος ψυχὴν, κίνησιν τινα καὶ ἐναρμόνιον ἧχον ἀφίησι [τὸ ὄχημα] σημαντικόν, οὗ αἰσθάνεται ἢ ἀνθρώπου ψυχῇ τῇ αἰσθήσει τῇ ἐν τῷ ἀρχοειδεῖ ὀχήματι.)

Human beings, since we are complex creatures with two vehicles and a corporeal body, can be active on any of these three levels. Each level has its own form of sensation, and data received on one level can be interpreted on another. Thus, what may be perceived at the lowest level as a random event, may be received also at the intermediate level as a daemonic message, and it in turn can be explained most clearly at the highest level.²⁹ This seems to be what Hermias is envisaging here, although the precise operations of the tri-level event are not clearly delineated or explained in what is a small point (about hearing daemonic voices) in a larger commentary.

Some further evidence of this triple division can be found earlier in the passage about daemonic actions in human lives, where Hermias examines why some people are aware of their personal daemon and others are not. After explaining that awareness of the daemon is dependent on whether or not the soul attends to its daemon properly and has drunk from Lethe appropriately (70.27-71.10), Hermias then turns to the role of what he terms the “arrangement of the universe” (that is, the metaphysical structure of the Neoplatonic universe from the One down to generation, 71.10-11). He writes (71.11-14):

This arrangement of the universe has made one individual suitable for being aware [of his or her daemon] but another not. For this purpose it has allotted to some but not to another the sort of body that bears such symbols in his or her visible body, or pneumatic body, or soul itself. (ἦδε ἡ τάξις τοῦ παντὸς τόνδε μὲν ἐπιτήδειον πρὸς τὸ συναισθάνεσθαι ἐποίησε, τόνδε δὲ οὐ· διὸ καὶ τῷδε μὲν τοιόνδε σῶμα ἐπεκλήρωσεν ὥστε καὶ σύμβολα

²⁹ See 71.19-22, where Hermias gives as examples of such seemingly random events a caught garment, a falling stone, an overheard word, and lightning strike. Those who live at the level of the corporeal body might well interpret these events as random, but one who has ascended to living at the level of the pneumatic vehicle will be able to interpret the events correctly as a daemonic sign.

φέρειν τοιάδε κατά τε τὸ φαινόμενον σῶμα κατά τε τὸ πνεῦμα
καὶ αὐτὴν τὴν ψυχὴν, τῶδε δὲ οὐδαμῶς.)

These symbols (σύμβολα) are theurgic properties that inhere in a soul that is properly adapted to union with the superior classes and higher divinities.³⁰ They are psychic attributes akin to sacred stones and other sacred objects that attract the attention and care of the higher powers, who in turn help accomplish the theurgical rites.³¹ Whether or not individuals have such *symbola* and at what level they have them is dependent in part on the goodness of the person, that is to say on where they fall in the theurgic scale.³² The higher that one ranges in the ascent ritual, the better one knows and attends to one's daemon.³³ The triple division here in Hermias' text mirrors the triple division of bodies. Just as there are corporeal bodies, pneumatic vehicles, and ethereal vehicles, so too there are *symbola* for each level. As we become more adept at theurgy and ascend higher up the chain of being, the *symbola* that we make use of become less material and more fitted to association with the gods.

Returning to Hermias' "community between the daemonic vehicle and that of the soul" (73.28), we can see now that the daemon, which has both an ethereal and a pneumatic vehicle, can send out a message at either level. For human souls that have the capacity to perceive at the pneumatic level, the daemonic message will be received and interpreted at that level; for human souls that have ascended higher in the ritual and have activated the power of their ethereal vehicles, the message will be received and interpreted by the soul in its ethereal

³⁰ Baltzly and Share (2018) 225 note 524 associate these *symbola* with natural virtues, but that is too narrow. Natural virtues belong to the lowest class of theurgic neophytes. Hermias clearly sees these *symbola* as connected to other, higher levels of the soul as well. If one were to use the scale of virtues, the lower virtues would pertain to the corporeal body, the purificatory virtues to the pneumatic vehicle, and the theurgic virtues to the ethereal level.

³¹ On the doctrine, see Iamblichus, *De Myst.* III.17 and Finamore (2013) 350-351.

³² For the pollution that attaches to the lower level of the soul's existence (body, pneumatic vehicle, and irrational soul) and the sort of purification required for each, see 78.26-79.8. This passage makes clear that once all three sorts of purification are applied, the soul can exist pure in its ethereal vehicle, ready to range higher in the cosmos to Intellect and even to the One itself.

³³ See Iamblichus, *De Myst.* V.18 on the three kinds of persons in the theurgic hierarchy.

vehicle. This is the “arrangement of the universe,” according to which we live at different levels of the cosmos.

Conclusion

We began with the question of whether Hermias’ interpretation of the vehicle of the soul differed in any significant way from that of Proclus and Syrianus. We discovered that Hermias accepted their triple division of bodies (ethereal vehicle, pneumatic vehicle, and corporeal body). Then, looking at his doctrine of daemonic interaction with human souls, we found that his interpretation of the three levels matched the Procline/Syrianic interpretation as well. For Hermias, as for Proclus, there are two vehicles and the level of one’s attainment in theurgy allows one to commune with gods and daemons at different levels. In this matter, at least, Hermias, Syrianus, and Proclus see eye to eye.

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