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“Between Human and Animal Souls”: The Resurrection of the Rational Soul and Origen’s Transformation of *Metensomatosis*

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ABSTRACT

Scholars argue that Origen conceives the soul’s progress within a modified Platonic paradigm (Marx-Wolf 2010; Ramelli 2017). Others suggest more alignment with the New Testament (Edwards 2002). According to Ramelli (2018), Origen advances that the soul occupies one earthly, human body (*ensomatosis*), rather than a cycle of multiple bodies (*metensomatosis*). Marx-Wolf (2010), however, argues that the rational soul, separated from the body, still is capable of advancement. Furthermore, Origen insists that the Christian teaching of the resurrection should contrast with *metensomatosis* (*ConCels* 5.29, 3.75). Nevertheless, Origen’s *Contra Celsum* preserves the language and imagery of *metensomatosis*. He harmonizes Plato’s cycle of generation (*Phaedrus* 249a-250e) with the Christian teaching of the soul’s resurrection (1*Cor.* 15). Like Plato, Origen preserves the souls’ future embodiment (*Phaedrus* 247b-c) and one dons this ethereal body at its resurrection in heaven, not on earth (*ConCels* 7.32, 7.44). Implicit in Origen’s disagreement with multiple earthly incarnations, is the suggestion that the human soul is born into animals or vice versa (Plato, *Phaedo* 81d-82b, *Phaedrus* 249b). To solve this conundrum, Origen incorporates the Stoic distinction of the rational, human soul and the non-rational, animal soul (Gilhus 2006; *ConCels* 7.17, 8.18). Thus, Origen transforms the paradigm of *metensomatosis*, limiting future resurrection to rational souls in heaven; barred are the non-rational souls of animals. This study analyzes Origen’s reading of Plato’s *Phaedrus* and *Timaeus* in view of *Genesis* and 1*Corinthians* and it provides a window into third-century AD debates among Platonists regarding the interpretation of Plato’s teachings.

Introduction

In the 6th century AD,¹ Origen of Alexandria was impugned with the charge of believing in the reincarnation (*metensomatosis*) of the soul, specifically of

¹ Portions of this article were presented as a paper at the annual meeting of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, Ottawa, Canada, 12-16 June 2019. I would like to thank the many comments and suggestions in writing and in person in Ottawa and Oxford, UK: Crystal Addey, Mark J. Edwards, John Finamore, Julio Cesar Moreira, Ilaria Ramelli, Aron Reppmann, Riemer Roukema, Markus Vinzent, and Sami Yli-Karjanmaa. A note on translations and critical editions: all translations unless otherwise stated are from Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick

human souls into the body of animals.² There has been research to re-examine Origen's presentation of *metempsychosis* apart from his later sixth-century detractors.³ Some like Heidi Marx-Wolf and Ilaria Ramelli see Origen's philosophy as Platonic in nature.⁴ Others like Mark J. Edwards are more skeptical and argue that Origen's philosophy derives from his interpretations of the Christian scriptures.⁵ Rightly, according to Ramelli, Origen advances that the rational soul occupies an earthly, human body only once (*ensomatosis*), rather than a cycle of multiple bodies (*metempsychosis*).⁶ This notwithstanding, Marx-Wolf argues that the rational soul, separated from the body, is still capable of advancement.⁷

Origen insists that the Christian teaching of the resurrection should contrast with *metempsychosis*.⁸ Nevertheless, Origen's *Contra Celsum* (*ConCels*) preserves the language and imagery inherent to the paradigm of *metempsychosis*. Instead, Origen harmonizes Plato's cycle of generation with Paul's teaching of the soul's resurrection.⁹ Additionally, like Plato, Origen preserves the idea of the soul's future embodiment.¹⁰ For Origen, however, one obtains this spiritual

(Cambridge, 1965); primary texts of *Contra Celsum* and *De principiis* derive from *Origenes: Contra Celsum libri VIII*, ed. M. Marcovich, SVigChr 54 (Leiden, 2001) and *Origen: On First Principles*, 2 vol., ed. John Behr (Oxford, 2017); passages of Plato's *Phaedrus* come from *Platonis Opera*, Book 2, ed. Ioannes Burnet, Scriptum Classicorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis (Oxford, 1901).

² Justinian, *Letter to Mennas*, ed. M.A.-L. Zingale, *Scritti teologici ed ecclesiastici di Giustiniano* (Milan, 1977), 68-118, 88-90.

³ U. Bianchi, 'Origen's Treatment of the Soul and the Debate over Metempsychosis', in Lothar Lies (ed.), *Origeniana Quarta: Die Referate des 4. Internationalen Origeneskongresses (Innsbruck, 2.-6. September 1985)*, Innsbrucker theologische Studien 19 (Innsbruck, 1985), 270-81; G. Dorival, 'Origène a-t-il enseigné la transmigration des âmes dans les corps d'animaux? (à propos de PArch 1.8.4)', in Henri Crouzel and Antonio Quacquarelli (eds), *Origeniana Secunda: Second colloque international des études origéniennes (Bari, 20-23 septembre 1977)*, Quaderni di 'Vetera Christianorum' 15 (Roma, 1980), 11-32; Lothar Lies, 'Origenes und Reinkarnation', *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 121 (1999), 139-58; Riemer Roukema, "'Die Liebe kommt nie zu Fall'" (1 Kor 13,8a) als Argument des Origenes gegen einen neuen Abfall der Seelen von Gott', in Wolfgang Bienert and Uwe Kühneweg (eds), *Origeniana Septima: Origenes in den Auseinandersetzungen des 4. Jahrhunderts*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 137 (Leuven, 1999), 15-25, and *id.*, 'Transmigration of Souls', in John Anthony McGuckin (ed.), *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (Louisville, KY, 2004), 205-7.

⁴ See Heidi Marx-Wolf, 'Third-Century Daimonologies and the *Via Universalis*: Origen, Porphyry and Iamblichus on *daimones* and Other Angels', *SP* 46 (2010), 207-15; Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, 'Origen and the Platonic Tradition', *Religions* 8 (2017), 1-20.

⁵ Mark J. Edwards, *Origen Against Plato* (Aldershot, 2002), 1-9.

⁶ Ilaria Ramelli, 'Origen', in Anna Marmodoro and Sophie Cartwright (eds), *A History of Mind and Body in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2018), 245-67, 249-50; see M.J. Edwards, *Origen against Plato* (2002), 96-101.

⁷ By 'rational souls', Marx-Wolf refers specifically to daemons and angels, but the process she observes arguably extends the rational souls of humans, Heidi Marx-Wolf, 'Third-Century Daimonologies and the *Via Universalis*' (2010), 212-4.

⁸ Origen, *ConCels*. 5.29, 3.75.

⁹ See Plato, *Phaedrus* 249a-250e; *1Cor.* 15.

¹⁰ See Plato, *Phaedrus* 247b-c.

body at its resurrection in heaven, not on earth.¹¹ Origen contends that the body must undergo some sort of qualitative change. Accordingly, the soul needs a body better suited to its purer state. Thus, the soul dons a ‘spiritual body’ in its new embodiment which is better suited to the ethereal area of heaven.¹²

Origen limits the future resurrection to rational souls. Barred from the ascent to heaven are the non-rational souls of animals. Origen disagrees with the idea that the non-rational soul can ascend or descend into multiple incarnations, that is the suggestion that the human soul is born into animals or *vice versa* (e.g. Plato, *Phaedo* 81d-82b, *Phaedrus* 249b). Origen implicitly refocuses *metempsychosis* within the context of a philosophic debate (among Stoics, Peripatetics, and Platonists) over the spiritual capacity of animal’s souls,¹³ which Origen characterizes as non-rational.¹⁴ Origen solves this conundrum by incorporating the Stoic distinction between the spiritual abilities of the rational human soul and the non-rational animal soul.¹⁵ Thus, Origen adopts this Stoic dichotomy to transform the paradigm of *metempsychosis* in the language and imagery of his depiction of resurrection, whereby its scope is limited only to the rational soul. The soul’s future embodiment occurs at its heavenly resurrection and not in another human lifetime.

Much of the discussion of Origen’s engagement with *metempsychosis* has focused on his treatment of the subject in *De Principiis* and *Commentarii in Evangelium Iohannis*, among other texts.¹⁶ Origen, however, preserves some lingering language and imagery of *metempsychosis* and transforms it in his description of the resurrection of the rational soul in his *Contra Celsum*, the sustained argument against the otherwise unknown middle Platonist Celsus. Here Origen is a reader of Plato and other eschatological literature, who departs from an evaluation of animal souls as rational and privy to personal eschatology. We can see this by Origen’s interpretation of Plato’s *Phaedrus* and *Timaeus* in view of the scriptures of *Genesis* and *1 Corinthians*.¹⁷ This study thus provides a window into not only third-century AD debates among Platonists and Stoics regarding the spiritual advancement of animals, but also the interpretation of Plato’s writings.

¹¹ Origen, *ConCels* 7.32, 7.44.

¹² *Ibid.* 5.19, 7.32.

¹³ See Richard Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origins of the Western Debate* (Ithaca, NY, 1993).

¹⁴ Origen, *ConCels* 1.20 and *in passim*.

¹⁵ See Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, *Animals, Gods and Humans: Changing Attitudes to Animals in Greek, Roman and Early Christian Ideas* (London, New York, 2006); *ConCels* 7.17, 8.18.

¹⁶ See U. Bianchi, ‘Origen’s Treatment of the Soul’ (1985), 270-81; G. Dorival, ‘Origène a-t-il enseigné la transmigration?’ (1980), 11-32; L. Lies, ‘Origenes und Reinkarnation’ (1999), 139-58; R. Roukema, “‘Die Liebe kommt nie zu Fall’” (1999), 15-25; R. Roukema, ‘Transmigration of Souls’ (2004), 205-7.

¹⁷ For an argument that Origen was a reader of the *Timaeus*, see Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, ‘Origen’s Allegoresis of Plato’s and Scripture’s “Myths”’, in Nathaniel P. DesRosiers and Lily C. Vuong (eds), *Religious Competition in the Greco-Roman World* (Atlanta, 2016), 85-105, 87-90.

Metempsychosis and Animals in Plato's Corpus

Before we examine Origen's treatment of animals and *metempsychosis*, which he associates with Plato, it is prudent to review what Plato writes about the subject. In Plato's corpus there are some general characteristics in his descriptions of reincarnation. First, for Plato, in the beginning there were only male humans. Later, in subsequent lifetimes, male humans developed into females, and then again became animals of various types. Second, Plato argues that this change from one body to another, is due to some moral and ethical failure of the soul, especially its lack of study of philosophy. Finally, however, it is possible for these souls to live in either human or animal bodies.

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato likens the soul to a charioteer driving a winged chariot led by two horses. Once all souls drove their chariots in the divine company of Zeus, the gods, and the daemons through heaven and to the vault of heaven (ἐπὶ τὴν ὑπουράνιον ἀγῖδα).¹⁸ Some souls, however, lost control of their chariots and fell to earth where they became embodied first as people, and subsequently lost their wings. On their second lifetime, souls have the choice on becoming incarnated into animal form.¹⁹ In the *Phaedo*, reincarnation as animals is due at least to a non-philosophical life, or at worst to an unjust life.²⁰ According to the myth of Er, found in the *Republic*, (virtually) each soul has the choice of its next life (whether that be human or animal, male or female); this choice is conditioned by the choices in its previous life.²¹ Finally, the *Timaeus* presents that all souls started their first embodiment as male humans. They then underwent changes in bodies to different types of animals only due to their failure to maintain their ideal ethical conduct.²²

Later Platonists (like Celsus as we shall see) referred to these Platonic source-texts regarding reincarnation. For some, Plato's thoughts on *metempsychosis* into animals seems to have received mixed reviews, with some perhaps taking these mythic passages literally or metaphorically.²³ Furthermore, not only did Origen have to deal with this Platonic legacy, but also with the creation accounts of *Genesis* which propose an almost reverse account than the *Timaeus*, with (1) sea animals, (2) birds, (3) land animals, (4) humans (and depending on which account, male then female).²⁴

¹⁸ Plato, *Phaedrus* 247b-c.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Plato, *Phaedo* 81d-82c.

²¹ *Id.*, *Respublica* 620a-d.

²² *Id.*, *Timaeus* 41e-42a, 90a-92c.

²³ See Giannis Stamatellos, 'Plotinus on Transmigration: A Reconsideration', *Journal of Ancient Philosophy* 7 (2013), 49-64, and Andrew Smith, 'Did Porphyry Reject the Transmigration of Human Souls into Animals?', *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 127 (1984), 276-84; I. Ramelli, 'Origen' (2018), 250, takes Origen's position as metaphorical.

²⁴ *Gen.* 1:20-6, 2:18-24; see Origen, *HomGen* 1.12.

Stoic and Platonist debate about the rationality of animals

Now let us turn to Origen's attitudes towards animals. Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, building upon Richard Sorabji,²⁵ situates Origen's views of animals in the context of Stoic and Platonist debate about the rationality of animals. Origen's views closely align with the approach held by many Stoics that animals lack reason (*logos*), whereas Celsus follows the position generally held by middle Platonists that animals could have it. Gilhus notes that Origen follows this Stoic evaluation of animals.²⁶ For Origen, animals are, in his words, 'non-rational' – ἄλογα ζῷα, as he repeatedly calls them.²⁷ Furthermore, similar to representatives of Stoic thought such as Epictetus, Origen's worldview is anthropocentric in nature; animals exist for humans, who are more important.²⁸ This Stoic anthropocentrism also fits well with the aforementioned account of the creation of animals given in *Genesis* 1:20-6, to which Origen refers when he claims primacy of humans over animals.²⁹

Origen's distinctions between humans and animals bar animals from participation in religious activity, since they are non-rational beings. He argues that the rational human soul forms part of a class of rational beings alongside angels and daemons.³⁰ Humans as rational beings have connection to Christ the Logos by way of reason (*logos*), which enables people to have religious ability.³¹

Origen frequently reminds his readers about his views towards animals. He frequently calls them non-rational and he often reiterates his negative views in the context of other arguments.³² Most often, Origen defines animals by what he says they are not: rational. They are properly understood to be non-rational in contrast to humans. Moreover, it becomes evident that this difference between the two, is not just in their respective faculties, but importantly due to the differences in their souls.

²⁵ R. Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals* (1993).

²⁶ Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, *Animals, Gods and Humans* (2006), 37-61 cites two works for the Stoic and Platonist debate: Philo, in *On Whether Dumb Animals Possess Reason*, argues against animals' access to reason (*logos*). Plutarch, in *On the Cleverness of Animals*, presents a debate whether land or sea animals are smarter, with the result that both have *logos*.

²⁷ See Origen, *ConCels* 1.20, 1.52, 3.17, 3.18, 3.75, 4.58, 4.75-4.79, 4.83-4.84, 4.88-4.91, 4.95-4.98, 5.36, 8.15, 8.30, 8.50, 8.53.

²⁸ See Epictetus, *Diss.* 1.6.18-20, 1.16.4-5.

²⁹ Origen, *ConCels* 4.83; see *Gen.* 1:26 and Origen, *HomGen* 1.12.

³⁰ Origen, *ConCels* 4.24; *DePrin* 1.5.1.

³¹ Origen, *ConCels* 4.25.

³² See Origen, *ConCels* 1.20, 1.52, 3.17, 3.18, 3.75, 4.58, 4.75-4.79, 4.83-4.84, 4.88-4.91, 4.95-4.98, 5.36, 8.15, 8.30, 8.50, 8.53.

Origen's alternate readings of the *Timaeus* to highlight animal differences

This distinction is seen in Origen's prevarication whether the soul for humans and animals was made by God prior to the body. Origen disagrees with Celsus' appeal to Plato's *Timaeus* in which the Demiurge made the soul, but the lesser gods would make the body.³³ Origen leaves unspoken in his criticism the source of Celsus' statements. Tacit, it seems, is the acknowledgement that the *Timaeus* holds that these original souls lived in human bodies and subsequently those of animals.³⁴ To this, Origen says that there are differences in bodies between humans and animals and there is a soul appropriate for each type of body.³⁵ The implication is that, if humans and animals have different types of bodies, they have different types of souls. Elsewhere, Origen grapples with Celsus' claim, and thus, Plato's description in *Timaeus* 69c, that the soul is the same shape (ὁμοειδῆ) for humans and animals.³⁶ Origen counters this claim that there is no difference (μηδὲν διαφέρειν) between the souls of humans and animals and proposes otherwise.³⁷ Origen considers that this opinion is that of someone who holds the soul can come not only to humans but also animals: 'This is the view of him who brings the soul down from the vaults of heaven not only to the human body **but even to other bodies also**' (ὅπερ κατάγοντός ἐστι τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀψίδων τοῦ οὐρανοῦ οὐκ ἐπὶ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον σῶμα μόνον **ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ λοιπὰ**).³⁸ The human soul, not that of animals, is in the 'image of God' (κατ εἰκόνα θεοῦ) of God, as Origen concludes, citing *Gen.* 1:26.³⁹

Origen's animosity to *metempsychosis*

The primary implication of Origen's stark contrast between human and animal souls is that animal souls are not privy to a personal eschatology akin to humans. This becomes apparent in Origen's statements against *metempsychosis*, which virtually always involve animals. It is clear that Origen strongly connects *metempsychosis* with animals and expects his readers to do so as well. Origen mocks Pythagorean (and Empedoclean) rationales for abstaining from meat because the animal killed might have the soul of someone they knew.⁴⁰ Origen speaks against the so-called 'myth about the soul having *metempsychosed*' (τὸν

³³ Celsus *apud* Origen, *ConCels* 4.58; see Plato, *Timaeus* 41d.

³⁴ Origen, *ConCels* 4.58.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Celsus *apud* Origen, *ConCels* 4.83.

³⁷ Origen, *ConCels* 4.83.

³⁸ *Ibid.*; trans. Chadwick (1965), 249, emphasis added; see Plato, *Phaedrus* 246c, 248d, 249a-c.

³⁹ *Ibid.*; see Origen, *HomGen* 1.3, at which Origen says it is not the body which makes humans in the image of God but in humans' mental faculties.

⁴⁰ Origen, *ConCels* 5.49.

περὶ ψυχῆς μετενσωματουμένης μῦθον)⁴¹ which, he says, is held by those who follow Pythagoras in their abstinence from eating ensouled beings (τῆς τῶν ἐμψύχων ἀποχῆς).⁴² Origen intimates, by quoting from Empedocles' poetry, that the reason for this abstinence from animals derives from a fear of eating a relative, like a father his child: 'Lift up his own son / And slay him with an imprecation, the great fool' (φίλον υἱὸν ἀείρας / σφάζει ἐπευχόμενος μέγα νήπιος).⁴³ Furthermore, elsewhere Origen clarifies his Christian rationale for not partaking in sacrifices. If Christians abstain' from animals by refusing to participate in these, he argues it is because of the daemons involved in the sacrifices and not because of *metensomatosis*.⁴⁴ Unlike Empedocles' reasons against sacrifice, Origen maintains that souls do not 'fall down all the way to non-rational animals' (κατάπτωσιν αὐτῆς μέχρι τῶν ἀλόγων ζώων).⁴⁵

In the context of other arguments, Origen reiterates his connection of *metensomatosis* with 'non-rational animals'. Specifically, his comments occur as part of his larger disdain of the Greeks' toleration of the Egyptian conception of God as 'non-rational animals'.⁴⁶ This view, in his opinion, is even worse than reincarnation. By this dissimilarity of *metensomatosis* and Egyptian zoomorphic religion, it becomes evident that the main problem here is not so much the idea of *metensomatosis* itself, but, as we have previously seen, that others allow for the 'rational' to come down to the 'non-rational' – in this case, God and not the rational human soul.⁴⁷ In another argument, Origen argues that Christians try to heal those affected by false teachings, such as the Epicureans who deny providence and the Stoics who claim God is material. Christians also heal people negatively affected by the teaching of *metensomatosis*, in which the 'logical can go to the non-logical animal'.⁴⁸

Origen's use of imagery pertaining to *metensomatosis*

A. The 'rational' soul's embodiment

Despite Origen's patent animosity to *metensomatosis* to animals, in multiple locations, Origen entertains rational human souls enjoying a similar process. He is open to a modified paradigm including the context of the human soul's

⁴¹ *Ibid.*; my translation.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Origen, *ConCels* 5.49, trans. Chadwick (1965), 303; Empedocles, 31 B137 Diehls-Kranz (*Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker: Griechisch und Deutsch*, ed. Hermann Diehls and Walther Kranz, vol. 1 [Berlin, 1974]).

⁴⁴ 5.49; see 1*Cor.* 8:8.

⁴⁵ Origen, *ConCels* 8.30, my translation.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 1.20; 1.52; 3.17-9.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 1.52.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 3.75.

earthly embodiment⁴⁹ and its second body at its future resurrection. Origen treats this embodiment with the language of *metempsychosis*. First, Origen compares the allegory of scripture to that of Plato's myths broadly, comparing the serpent and the two trees in Eden to the birth of Eros from Penia and Poros of Plato's *Symposium*.⁵⁰ Second, Origen points to Genesis again and the 'leather tunics' (δερματίνοὺς ... χιτῶνας) that Adam and Eve come to wear.⁵¹ This clothing, it seems, refers roughly to the rational soul's embodiment.⁵²

And the statement that the man [Adam] who was cast out of the garden with the woman [Eve] was clothed with 'leather tunics', which God made for those who had sinned on account of the transgression of mankind, has a certain secret and mysterious meaning, superior to the Platonic doctrine of the descent of the soul which loses its wings and is carried hither 'until it finds some firm resting-place'.

Καὶ ὁ ἐκβαλλόμενος δὲ ἐκ τοῦ παραδείσου ἄνθρωπος μετὰ τῆς γυναικὸς, τοὺς “δερματίνοὺς” ἠμφιεσμένους “χιτῶνας”, οὗς διὰ τὴν παράβασιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐποίησε τοῖς ἁμαρτήσασιν ὁ θεός, ἀπόβρητόν τινα καὶ μυστικὸν ἔχει λόγον, ὅπερ τὴν κατὰ Πλάτωνα κάθ<οδ>ον τῆς ψυχῆς, περορῆρουσῆς καὶ δεῦρο φερομένης, “ἕως ἂν στερεοῦ τινος λάβηται”. (Origen, *ConCels* 4.40, trans. Chadwick [1965], 216-7, slightly modified)

Origen compares the two accounts but suggests that the story of the soul as expressed in *Genesis* has a more profound meaning than what Plato writes in the *Phaedrus* about the descent of the winged soul to its earthly embodiment.⁵³ Despite his insistence that *Genesis* provides a better account, this does not prevent Origen from using imagery from Plato's *Phaedrus* to discuss the soul's eschatology. He continues to compare this afterlife with the myth of the winged souls' ascent (Plato, *Phaedrus* 247a-250c).⁵⁴

In other locations, Origen defends the position that the Christian scriptures do indeed provide allegories of the soul. He argues for the sacred content of biblical texts, pointing to earlier precedence. He maintains that, if others can maintain that Dionysus was torn apart by Titans, so too could others like Celsus

⁴⁹ For the argument that Origen did not espouse the pre-existence of the soul, see M.J. Edwards, 'Origen against Plato' (2002), 89-93, 94-7 and I. Ramelli, 'Origen' (2018), 247; for the argument that Origen did, see Peter W. Martens, 'Embodiment, Heresy, and the Hellenization of Christianity: The Descent of the Soul in Plato and Origen', *HTR* 108 (2015), 594-620.

⁵⁰ Origen, *ConCels* 4.39; *Gen.* 2:8-9; Plato, *Symposium* 203b-e.

⁵¹ Origen, *ConCels* 4.39; *Gen.* 3:21, my translation.

⁵² See Irenaeus, *AdvHaer* 1.5.5; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 3.95.2; Tertullian, *DeResCarn* 7; Origen may not have seen this allegory as precisely implying embodiment as Epiphanius, *Anacortatus* 62.3, 64.4 later claims; see H. Chadwick, *Contra Celsum* (1965), 216 n. 5 and I. Ramelli, 'Origen' (2018), 252.

⁵³ See *Gen.* 3:21, Plato, *Phaedrus* 246b-c; see P.W. Martens, 'Embodiment, Heresy, and the Hellenization of Christianity' (2015), 613-20.

⁵⁴ See Origen, *ConCels* 3.80; 1.13 and 3.80.

see the deeper messages of the Christian scriptures.⁵⁵ Furthermore, Origen insists that Celsus wrongly understands the scriptures; for, ‘If he had understood, he would have seen that these meanings provide insight into the rational soul’.⁵⁶ As Origen says,

If he [Celsus] had understood what is appropriate for a soul which will have everlasting life and what is the right view of its essence and origin, he would not have ridiculed in this way the idea of an immortal person entering a mortal body.

Εἰ δὲ ἦν ἐννοήσας, τί ἀκολουθεῖ ψυχῆ ἐν αἰωνίῳ ἐσομένῃ ζωῇ καὶ τί χρὴ φρονεῖν περὶ τῆς οὐσίας αὐτῆς καὶ περὶ τῶν ἀρχῶν αὐτῆς, οὐκ ἂν οὕτως διέεσυρε τὸν ἀθάνατον εἰς θνητὸν ἐρχόμενον σῶμα. (*ConCels* 4.17, trans. Chadwick [1965], 195)

Origen continues to say that this view maintained by Christians of the soul’s embodiment is better than *metempsychosis*: it is ‘not according to the *metempsychosis* of Plato, but according to a different and more sublime view’ (οὐ κατὰ τὴν Πλάτωνος μετεμψωμάτωσιν ἀλλὰ κατ’ ἄλλην τινὰ ὑψηλοτέραν θεωρίαν).⁵⁷ If Celsus knew this, he would have understood how Jesus came to help people.⁵⁸

Once more, Origen discusses the coming of Jesus’ soul into a body, referring to the paradigm of *metempsychosis*. In response to Celsus’ claims that Jesus was an illegitimate child, Origen appeals in theory to the process of the *metempsychosis* of Jesus’ soul coming into his body. Origen entertains this process (although only by allusion) to explain his understanding of Jesus’ incarnation contrary to Celsus’ maligning of the circumstances of his virgin birth. According to Origen, Celsus previously accused Jesus’ mother of conceiving him in an affair with a man named Panthera.⁵⁹ Origen counters Celsus’ claims to argue that Jesus was born from a virgin. Specifically, he points to the historical rationale among key thinkers, whom he associates with *metempsychosis* (Pythagoras, Empedocles, Plato), that the actions of the soul determine the next embodiment.

Or is it more reasonable (and I say this now following Pythagoras, Plato, and Empedocles, whom Celsus often mentions) that there are certain secret principles by which each soul that enters a body does so in accordance with its merits and former character? It is therefore probable that this soul, which lived a more useful life on earth than many men (to avoid appearing to beg the question by saying ‘all men’), needed a body which was not only distinguished among human bodies, but was also superior to all others.

⁵⁵ Origen, *ConCels* 4.17. By this, Origen refers the allegorical reading of the so-called ‘Orphic’ poems in which the Titans dismember Dionysus’ body. For further discussion, Dwayne A. Meisner, *Orphic Tradition and the Birth of the Gods* (Oxford, 2018), 253-73.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*; translation modified from Chadwick (1965), 195.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *ConCels* 1.32; trans. Chadwick (1965), 32: ‘... she had been convicted of adultery and had a child by a certain soldier named Panthera’.

Ἡ εὐλογώτερον ἐκάστην ψυχὴν κατὰ τινος ἀπορρήτου λόγου (λέγω δὲ ταῦτα νῦν κατὰ Πυθαγόραν καὶ Πλάτωνα καὶ Ἐμπεδοκλέα, οὓς πολλάκις ὠνόμασεν ὁ Κέλσος,) εἰσκρινομένην σώματι κατ' ἀξίαν εἰσκρίνεσθαι καὶ κατὰ τὰ πρότερα ἦθη; Εἰκὸς οὖν καὶ ταύτην τὴν ψυχὴν, πολλῶν (ἵνα μὴ συναρπάξῃν δοκῶ, λέγων πάντων) ἀνθρώπων ὠφελιμωτέραν τῷ βίῳ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπιδημοῦσαν, δεδεῆσθαι σώματος, οὐ μόνον ὡς ἐν ἀνθρωπίνοις σώμασι διαφέροντος ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ πάντων κρείττονος. (*ConCels* 1.32, trans. Chadwick [1965], 32)

Origen entertains that a process similar to *metensomatosis* would explain why Jesus' 'miraculous conception' and his 'miraculous birth' must have matched the qualities of his soul's virtues.⁶⁰ Origen seems fine to associate hypothetically the paradigm of *metensomatosis* with the coming of Jesus' soul into his body. In this passage, Origen discusses the embodiment of a rational soul (as Origen classifies Jesus the Logos)⁶¹ as opposed to that of the non-rational souls of animals.

B. *The rational soul's resurrection: the soul's second embodiment*

The language and imagery pertaining to *metensomatosis* also occur alongside his discussion of resurrection and the soul's ascent. Origen transforms the process significantly to only apply to the rational soul, preserving the language of Plato's *Phaedrus* where in the soul's winged chariot and two horses travels through heaven to the other side of its heavenly vault. Origen maintains that, through the help of the Logos, one can ascend in prayer to the realm above vault of heaven:

He does not stop even at the **vault of heaven**, but comes in mind to the **[hyperouranic] region** ... through the mediation of His Son who is the Logos of God.

ὑπερναβαίνει τὸν ὅλον κόσμον. Καὶ οὐδ' ἐπὶ τὴν ἀψίδα ἵσταται τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, ἀλλ' εἰς τὸν ὑπερουράνιον γενόμενος τῇ διανοίᾳ τόπον διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ λόγου ὄντος θεοῦ... (Origen, *ConCels* 3.80, trans. Chadwick [1965], 181; see Plato, *Phaedrus* 247b-c, emphasis mine)

Origen also writes, citing *1Cor.* 8:5-6, that the souls of the just ascend to the likeness of angels, through reason (*logos*):

We know too that the angels are so far superior to men that when men are made perfect they become equal to angels. "**For in the resurrection of the dead** they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but the **righteous are as the angels of heaven**", and they **become "equal to angels"**.... We also see that, though we men fall short of these beings, we have hopes that by living a good life and doing everything **according to reason** we may ascend to the likeness of all these.

⁶⁰ *ConCels* 1.32.

⁶¹ See Origen, *ConCels* 4.24, *DePrin* 1.5.1 although he stresses that Christ the Logos is not really the same as the human soul.

οἶδαμεν δὲ καὶ τοὺς ἀγγέλους οὕτως εἶναι ἀνθρώπων κρείττονας, ὥστε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τελειωθέντας ἰσαγγέλους γίνεσθαι· “ἐν γὰρ τῇ ἀναστάσει τῶν νεκρῶν οὔτε γαμοῦσιν οὔτ’ ἐγγαμίζονται, ἀλλ’ εἰσὶν ὡς οἱ ἄγγελοι τῶν οὐρανῶν” οἱ δίκαιοι καὶ γίνονται “ἰσαγγελοι”... καὶ ὁρῶμεν ὅτι πολὺ τούτων ἡμεῖς οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἀπολειπόμενοι ἐλπίδας ἔχομεν ἐκ τοῦ καλῶς βιοῦν καὶ πάντα πράττειν κατὰ τὸν λόγον ἀναβαίνειν ἐπὶ τὴν τούτων πάντων ἐξομοίωσιν. (Origen, *ConCels* 4.29, trans. Chadwick [1965], 204, emphasis mine)⁶²

We see that Origen appeals to Plato and Paul as bases for the ascension of the human soul. When these three passages are taken collectively, we see that Origen reframes the rational soul’s ascent as described by Plato to imply the ascent to the realm of the angels. Reason (*logos*) is the key to this ascent, hence the access to this eschatology only for rational souls and not non-rational animals.

Origen proceeds to explain how the body, at the resurrection, must qualitatively change. He responds to Celsus’ claim that they hope for the rotted corpse to be brought to life. First, he cites passages from *1Corinthians* wherein Paul discusses the resurrection of the body. Corroborating his argument Origen explicitly calls upon *1Cor.* 14:40-4 wherein Paul compares the resurrection of the dead to grain which must die in order to sow its seeds.⁶³ Origen explicates the passage that the body must be ‘sown’ by dying so it can ‘take up a body which is appointed by God...’⁶⁴ Origen then quotes from *1Corinthians* further where Paul distinguishes a ‘natural’ body from a ‘spiritual’ body.⁶⁵ Later, Origen quotes the apostle Paul who describes this transformation as a person having the ‘image of the heavenly’.⁶⁶ Recall again that Origen makes it clear that animals are not in the image of God. And (elsewhere) that the image of God is the rational nature of humans.

Language and imagery pertaining to *metempsychosis* (especially its sublunar locale) also occur alongside resurrection. Instead, he provides a correction to it. Later Origen provides a rationale for the body’s qualitative change, because at time of resurrection the soul needs a body better suited to its purer state.⁶⁷ On this Origen says:

We do not talk about the resurrection, as Celsus imagines, because we have misunderstood the doctrine of *metempsychosis*, but because we know that when the soul, which in its own nature is incorporeal and invisible, is in any material place, it requires a body suited to the nature of that environment. In the first place, it bears this body after it has **put off the former body** which was necessary at first, but which is now superfluous in its second state. In the second place, it **puts a body on top of that** which it possessed

⁶² See Origen, *DePrin* 2.11.6.

⁶³ Origen, *ConCels* 4.57.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*; trans. Chadwick (1965), 231.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*; trans. Chadwick (1965), 231.

⁶⁶ *ConCels* 5.19.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 7.32; for a similar account of another body, see Origen, *DePrin* 2.10.1.

formerly because it needs a **better garment for the purer, ethereal, and heavenly regions...**

... ὅτι οὐχ, ὡς οἶεται Κέλσος, τῆς μετενσωματώσεως παρακούσαντες τὰ περί ἀναστάσεώς φαμεν ἀλλ' εἰδότες ὅτι ἡ τῆ ἑαυτῆς φύσει ἀσώματος καὶ ἀόρατος ψυχὴ ἐν παντὶ σωματικῷ τόπῳ τυγχάνουσα δέεται σώματος οἰκείου τῆ φύσει τῷ τόπῳ ἐκεῖνῳ ὄπερ ὅπου μὲν φορεῖ ἀπεκδυσαμένη <τὸ> **πρότερον** ἀναγκαῖον μὲν περισσὸν δὲ ὡς πρὸς τὰ δαέτερα. Ὅπου δὲ **ἐπενδυσασμένη** ἧ πρότερον εἶχε, δεομένη **κρείττονος ἐνδύματος εἰς τοὺς καθαρωτέρους καὶ αἰθερίους καὶ οὐρανίους τόπους...** (*ConCels* 7.32, trans. Chadwick [1965], 420, emphasis mine)

Here, Origen proposes two things: (1) The soul rids itself of its previous body, and (2) takes on a new body for its new location.⁶⁸ This resurrection, despite his suggestions otherwise, is akin to the next embodiment as implied elsewhere about *metempsychosis*. Origen even uses language reminiscent of the soul's ascent to heaven in Plato's *Phaedrus*. Origen's description of this location as εἰς τοὺς καθαρωτέρους καὶ αἰθερίου καὶ οὐρανίους τόπους (*ConCels* 7.32) mirrors the language used by Plato to describe the ascent of the winged soul through heaven to the *hyperouranic* locale of the gods and daemons (ἐπὶ τὴν ὑπουράνιον ἀψίδα),⁶⁹ which Origen aligns with how he describes the realm of angels.

The difference, however, is that the soul's next embodiment does not happen repeatedly on earth, but once at the resurrection in heaven.⁷⁰ Furthermore, conspicuously absent is any discussion of non-rational animals. Instead, we see an openness to the language of *metempsychosis*, provided that the rational soul's life in a human body does not occur over multiple times, or that this rational soul transmigrates into the bodies of non-rational animals.

Conclusion

Origen modifies this paradigm of *metempsychosis* to bar non-rational animal souls from the process, using the Stoic privation of *logos* to them. Instead, despite his disavowal of *metempsychosis*, Origen describes the future resurrection of elect souls with a spiritual body in terms reminiscent of Plato's cycle of generation.⁷¹ Origen synchronizes his readings of Christian scriptures (*Genesis* and *1Corinthians*) and Plato's writings (*Phaedrus* and *Timaeus*) in such a way that the soul's embodiment and future resurrection mirror the paradigm of *metempsychosis* – without animals. Origen positively associates the

⁶⁸ Origen, *ConCels* 7.32.

⁶⁹ Plato, *Phaedrus* 247b.

⁷⁰ See I. Ramelli, 'Origen and the Platonic Tradition' (2017), 2; H. Marx-Wolf, 'Third-Century Daimonologies and the *Via Universalis*' (2010), 212-4.

⁷¹ Plato, *Phaedrus* 247a-250e.

Phaedrus' imagery of the soul's ascent with rational humans. Missing from these accounts are Origen's discussion of animals. He corrects alternative accounts of the earthly *metensomatosis* of humans to animals (or human to human – which is not a primary concern in *ConCels*).

The just rational soul's eschatology in *ConCels* is in heaven and not on earth. Origen does not seem to have problems with rational souls coming into bodies or the taking on of another body at the resurrection (although this soul likely has a continuity of its identity, contrary to what is found largely in Plato). Thus, using the Stoic dichotomies between rational and non-rational souls, Origen interprets Plato through the lens of scripture to transform the paradigm of *metensomatosis*. He provides the Christian embodiment at the resurrection as a proper understanding of the soul's eschatology in contrast to what he presents other Platonists to claim.