

# JOHN PHILOPONUS ON THE BODILY RESURRECTION<sup>1</sup>

## 1. INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM

John Philoponus was probably the most influential Byzantine philosopher in non-theological matters and also a very influential, but even more controversial theologian. He belonged to the Severian non-Chalcedonian camp, where he became the principal theoretician of the so-called Tritheism, which was, in the sixth century, one of the three major Trinitarian doctrines. Within the “Tritheite” Church, he provoked a new schism by his teaching about the resurrection. The schism took place short before the death of Philoponus near 565, but did not stop after him.

Philoponus’ controversial teaching on the resurrection is known in general, but remains unclear in the details. It is clear that Philoponus shared the Origenist view on the resurrection as an exchange of body. The new body must be numerically different from the dead one — instead of being the previous one, but transformed into an incorruptible state. Such a position was always (at least, since the late third century, in the first known anti-Origenist polemics led by Methodius of Olympus) considered by its opponents as a total negation of the resurrection. Indeed, what is resurrected in this case? Certainly, not the soul which has never died, but also not the dead body, either. Then, what?

Philoponus not only knew all this argumentation but, together with the theological mainstream of his epoch, was disposed negatively toward Origen. Thus, he certainly had an answer to this question. Our modern problem is that we do not understand Philoponus in this respect, which is not a particular theological subtlety but a very fundamental anthropological issue: what is the identity of the human individual?

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It is clear that Philoponus, unlike Origen, included the body into his concept of the human identity. But in what manner?<sup>2</sup>

## 2. SOURCES

We have only two primary sources, both of which are not only hostile to Philoponus, but present him from the same viewpoint, that of his former “Tritheite”-fellows Cononites (named after their leading bishop Conon). The first and the most important source is a Cononite anti-Philoponian florilegium preserved in the Syriac version. It contains several quotes from the lost works of Philoponus. The second source is in Greek: the late sixth-century Chalcedonian catalogue of heresies written by Timotheus, presbyter of Constantinople. This source, however, also relies on some Cononite exposition of the teaching of Philoponus. Other Byzantine sources on the Philoponian teaching on the resurrection seem to be completely dependent on Timotheus (or his primary source).

The problem in our understanding of Philoponus arises because these sources in their available forms are inconsistent. The attempts to extract from them a doctrine exempt from a striking contradiction — impossible in such a great logician of the time as Philoponus — have failed.

## 3. PHILOPONUS’ CRITICISMS AGAINST GREGORY OF NYSSA

According to the Cononite florilegium, the two main opponents of Philoponus in the Christian past were Gregory of Nyssa and Cyril of Alexandria. Philoponus argued against both of them in a very harsh manner. The meaning of the Philoponian criticism of Gregory of Nyssa was clarified by Lionel Wickham in a short article that passed without due attention from the scholarly world.<sup>3</sup>

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(2) I consider the problem of human identity in Philoponus in more detail in В. М. ЛУРЬЕ, “Идентичность человеческой личности по Иоанну Филопону: физическое тело в пространстве и человеческое тело по воскресении” [The identity of the human personality according to John Philoponus: The physical body in space and the human body after the resurrection], *Εἰσαί. Проблемы Философии и Теологии*, 1(1) (2012), с. 307–339 (also in on-line version <<http://einai.ru/2012-01-Lurie.html>>, accessed 12/16/2012) (in Russian).

(3) L. R. WICKHAM, “John Philoponus and Gregory of Nyssa’s Teaching on Resurrection — A Brief Note,” in *Studien zu Gregor von Nyssa und den christlichen Spätantike*, ed. by H. R. DROBNER, Ch. KLOCK, Leiden, 1990, pp. 205–

Philoponus argued against Gregory's doctrine of the material identity between the dead and the resurrected bodies (according to Gregory, the material parts which once participated in the human body are sealed by the soul, and so, will be found and put in their place in the resurrection). The doctrine of the Cononites, as Timotheus testifies, was the same: Καὶ πάλιν ἀναμορφοῦσθαι τὴν αὐτὴν ὕλην λέγουσι, κρεῖττον εἶδος δεχομένην ἄφθαρτον καὶ αἰώνιον,<sup>4</sup> namely, the matter is unchanged, the *eidos* becomes new.

Against this, Philoponus stated that the matter of the resurrected bodies is "created" (δημιουργεῖσθαι) by God as a completely new one, whereas the previous one is "destroyed according to both matter and *eidos* (φθείρεσθαι κατὰ τε ὕλην καὶ εἶδος)."<sup>5</sup> We still need to discuss the problem of destruction "according to *eidos*," even if this doctrine is attributed to Philoponus by both Timotheus and the Cononite florilegium. However, the destruction "according to matter" is confirmed by the very fact of Philoponus' polemics against Gregory of Nyssa; otherwise, Philoponus would certainly agree with him.

Lawrence Schrenk proposed an untenable interpretation of Philoponus' doctrine ascribing to him two ideas. One of them is, in my opinion, absolutely outside the real theological context of the sixth century — about an uncreated "divine matter," from which the resurrected bodies will be "crafted" (Schrenk must avoid translating δημιουργέω as "create").<sup>6</sup> Another one (about identity of bodies as their place in space) is also incompatible with Philoponus' views, but, at least, it con-

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210. Theresia Hainthaler did not take this paper into account. Cf. „Heftig kritisiert werden Cyrill und Gregor von Nyssa, der letztere, ohne daß — aus den vorhandenen Fragmenten — die inhaltlichen Gründe ersichtlich sind“ (A. GRILLMEIER mit Th. HAINTHALER, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche*. Bd 2/4. *Die Kirche von Alexandrien mit Nubien und Äthiopien nach 451*, Mit einem Nachtrag aktualisiert, Freiburg, Basel, Wien, 2004, S. 142).

(4) PG 86/1, 61D.

(5) τὰ σώματα τὰ αἰσθητὰ ταῦτα πάντα καὶ ὁρώμενα, κατὰ τε ὕλην καὶ εἶδος ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος εἰς τὸ εἶναι παραχθῆναι ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ· φθαρτὰ τε ταῦτα γενέσθαι, καὶ φθείρεσθαι κατὰ τε ὕλην καὶ εἶδος, καὶ ἀντὶ τούτων ἕτερα σώματα κρεῖττονα τούτων τῶν ὁρωμένων ἄφθαρτα καὶ αἰώνια ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ δημιουργεῖσθαι (PG 86.1, 61C).

(6) L. P. SCHRENK, "John Philoponus on the Immortal Soul," *The American Catholic Philosophical Association Proceedings*, 64 (1990), pp. 151–160. For a detailed criticism of Schrenk's approach, cf. ЛУРЬЕ, "Идентичность...", С. 319–327.

tains an interesting intuition, namely, that we have to put Philoponus' ideas of *bodily* resurrection within the context of his physics.

#### 4. *Eidos* IN PHILOPONUS' PHYSICS

In his Commentary on the *Physics* of Aristotle, Philoponus provides the following argumentation against the possibility of the existence of vacuums:

Even if you remove all the qualities of the body, even then the bodily duration will be not identical to the vacuum. Because even if we exclude all the qualities of the body, the matter that forms the volume and the non-qualified body (τὸ ἄποιον σῶμα) remain, the latter being composed from the matter and the quantifying *eidos* (τὸ κατὰ ποσὸν εἶδος), whereas the vacuum is not composed from the matter and the *eidos*, because it is not a body but it is incorporeal and immaterial and only the place of the body.<sup>7</sup>

It is clear from this and other places in the same commentary that, for Philoponus, the material body consists of two main components: matter and the *eidos* which quantifies the matter. This understanding of the *eidos* is applicable to human bodies, too, because it is formulated for physical material bodies in general.

Therefore, it seems *a priori* very unlikely that Philoponus could negate the existence of the "quantifying *eidos*" in the resurrected bodies.

#### 5. PHILOPONUS' CRITICISMS AGAINST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

The basic disagreement between Philoponus and Cyril (and the Cononites) was related to the understanding of human nature. It is implied in Philoponus' criticism of Cyril's understanding of the bodily resurrection. The general line of argumentation is the following. If you (Cyril) acknowledge that the resurrected bodies will be immortal, but, at the same time, you insist on their identity by nature with dead bodies, you destroy the very definition of a human, because man is a living

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(7) κὰν γὰρ πᾶσαν ἀνέλης τοῦ σώματος ποιότητα, οὐδ' οὕτως ταῦτόν ἐσται τὸ σωματικὸν διάστημα τῷ κενῷ. κὰν γὰρ ἀφέλωμεν πᾶσαν ποιότητα τοῦ σώματος, καταλειφθήσεται ἡ ὀγκωθεῖσα ὕλη καὶ τὸ ἄποιον σῶμα, ὅπερ σύγκειται ἐξ ὕλης καὶ τοῦ κατὰ ποσὸν εἶδους, τὸ δὲ κενὸν οὐ σύγκειται ἐξ ὕλης καὶ εἶδους· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐστὶ σῶμα, ἀλλὰ ἀσώματον καὶ ἄυλον, καὶ χώρα μόνη σώματος (Ioannes Philoponus, *In Aristotelis physico-rum libros octo commentaria*, ed. by H. VITELLI, 2 vols. (CAG, 16, 17), Berlin, 1887–1888, p. 687.30–35).

(11) Cf. van Roey's translation: "Mais comme énonçant une règle, tu dis..." (*ibid.*) accompanied with a note "Traduction incertaine" (n. 58). I understand the expression **אנך דמיא דאנך דמיא** as "you take as granted / by way of acknowledgment."

= σχῆμα) does not entail a different nature. But how the corruptible could not be of different nature than the incorruptible, and the mortal — than the immortal? Thus we contradict the nature of things (κατὰ φύσιν τῶν πραγμάτων) and the Divine Scripture.

It is important to us here that, according to Philoponus, *schema* is a suitable term for what is changed in the resurrection apart from matter.

*Schema* is a synonym of *eidos*, but the anti-Philoponian sources say univocally that it is the *eidos* which will be changed, together with the matter, according to Philoponus, in the resurrection. Both the Cononites and the Calcedonians (such as Timotheus) shared the view that matter will be preserved but it is the *eidos*, which will be changed. The Cononites, as Timotheus reports, stated that the dead bodies κατὰ δὲ τὸ εἶδος μόνον φθείρονται (“are destroyed according to the *eidos* only”) and πάλιν ἀναμορφοῦσθαι τὴν αὐτὴν ὕλην ..., κρεῖττον εἶδος δεχομένην ἄφθαρτον καὶ αἰώνιον (“will be formed anew, having the same matter but receiving a better *eidos*, the incorrupted and eternal”).<sup>12</sup>

We have seen in the genuine quote from Philoponus that he used, instead of *eidos*, the Cyrillian term *schema* to mark what is changed apart from the matter in the resurrected body. From what is known from his Commentary on *Physics*, it is clear that the two terms, *eidos* and *schema*, were not identical to Philoponus, whereas the difference would be hardly comprehensible to his theological opponents.

Thus, in another important passage (*On the Creation of the World*, 6.23) Philoponus writes that the soul is the *eidos* of the body, in the Aristotelean sense of “separable *entelecheia*” of the body.<sup>13</sup> Here Philopon-

(12) ...τὰ σώματα τὰ αἰσθητὰ ταῦτα καὶ ὁρώμενα, κατὰ μὲν τὴν ὕλην οὐ φθείρεται, ἀλλὰ μένουσι τὰ αὐτὰ καὶ ὁρώμενα εἰς αἰεὶ μὴ φθειρόμενα· κατὰ δὲ τὸ εἶδος μόνον φθείρονται. Καὶ πάλιν ἀναμορφοῦσθαι τὴν αὐτὴν ὕλην λέγουσι, κρεῖττον εἶδος δεχομένην ἄφθαρτον καὶ αἰώνιον. Γένεσιν μὲν τοῦ ὁρωμένου κόσμου λέγουσι, κατὰ τε ὕλην καὶ εἶδος, φθορὰν δὲ αὐτοῦ ἡγοῦν παρέλευσιν κατὰ μόνον τὸ εἶδος. Τὴν γὰρ ὕλην, ὡς εἵπομεν, αἰεὶ διαμένειν ὁμολογοῦσι τὴν αὐτὴν (PG 86.1, 61D–64A).

(13) κοινῶς γὰρ πᾶσαν ψυχὴν Ἀριστοτέλης ὠρίσατο ἐντελέχειαν εἶναι σώματος φυσικοῦ ὁργανικοῦ δυνάμει ζωὴν ἔχοντος, τουτέστιν εἶδος καὶ τελειότητα καὶ συνοχὴν τοῦ σώματος· τῆς δὲ ἐντελεχείας τὴν μὲν εἶναι φησιν ἀχώριστον, ὡς ἡ μουσικὴ ἐνέργεια τῶν αὐλῶν καὶ τῆς λύρας, οἷα ἐστὶ καὶ ἡ τῶν ἀλόγων ζώων ψυχὴ τῇ ἁρμονίᾳ συνδιαλυομένη τοῦ σώματος· ἡ δὲ χωριστή, ὡς ὁ κυβερνήτης τῆς νεῶς καὶ ὁ ἡνίοχος τοῦ ἄρματος· εἰδοποιοῦσι γὰρ ὁ μὲν τὴν ναῦν, ὁ δὲ τὸ ἄρμα, ὡς καὶ ἡ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ψυχὴ τὸ λογικὸν ζῶον (Joannes Philoponus, *De opificio mundi*

nus explains why it is the soul which makes a human — a human, that is, a rational living being. Thus, it is hardly possible for Philoponus to share any teaching which would cut off the resurrected body from its *eidos* which is its soul.

Nevertheless, beside anti-Philoponian sources which simply ascribe to him such a teaching, there is, in the Cononite *florilegium*, a verbal quote from Philoponus where he seems to say the same thing himself.

## 6. THE *CRUX INTERPRETUM*

Let us read carefully the corresponding text:<sup>14</sup>

וְכָל מִסְתָּמִּים בְּחַיָּתָא דְּחַיִּים וְכָל מִסְתָּמִּים בְּחַיָּתָא דְּחַיִּים  
וְכָל מִסְתָּמִּים בְּחַיָּתָא דְּחַיִּים וְכָל מִסְתָּמִּים בְּחַיָּתָא דְּחַיִּים  
וְכָל מִסְתָּמִּים בְּחַיָּתָא דְּחַיִּים וְכָל מִסְתָּמִּים בְּחַיָּתָא דְּחַיִּים  
וְכָל מִסְתָּמִּים בְּחַיָּתָא דְּחַיִּים וְכָל מִסְתָּמִּים בְּחַיָּתָא דְּחַיִּים

Therefore, in the resurrection, the bodies of men will become that which they have not been before, and so, the former (bodies) will not resurrect because they perished and there will be no similar (bodies) to them. And not only by number<sup>15</sup> they will be different from the present ones, but they will be not identical to them according to the *eidos* (עֵיִדוֹן = κατ'εἶδον), because, in the resurrection, they will be incorruptible and immortal.

In the light of our previous observation, it would be natural to suppose that there is, here, one wrong “not.” Namely, the resurrected bodies must be different from the dead ones by number, but not by the *eidos*, because they have the only and the same soul, but the soul is, according to Philoponus, the *eidos* of the living body, and, in general, any body has, according to his commentary to *Physics*, its own “quantifying *eidos*” which remains unchanged after the complete removing of the qualities.

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*libri vii*, ed. by W. REICHARDT (Bibliotheca scriptorum graecorum et romano-  
rum Teubneriana), Leipzig, 1897, p. 278. 3–13; the same text is republished in:  
Johannes Philoponos, *De opificio mundi, Über die Erschaffung der Welt, übersetzt  
und eingeleitet*, ed. by C. SCHOLTEN, vol. 3, p. 584.14–22. Cf. also 1.16 (p. 36.13,  
38.16–17, ed. by REICHARDT)).

(14) VAN ROEY, “Un traité cononite...”, p. 136–137.

(15) Identity or difference “by number” is a common philosophical term, from the Antiquity to our days, signifying the physical (extensional) identity or the lack thereof.







Here we have an authentic Philoponian teaching of the elements from which the resurrected bodies are composed. They are not physically identical (“by number”) to the elements of the dead bodies, but they share with them the same *eidos*. These elements result from “generation” and not a “change” of the previous ones. The difference is to be understood in the light of Philoponus’ Commentary on *On Coming-to-Be and Perishing*: “Generation is a transformation according to the essence from non-being to being, whereas change is a transformation of something which is created by the *eidos* according to something accidental to it.”<sup>22</sup>

The generation does not affect the prime matter/substrate (ὑποκειμένον): “for the generation does not affect the prime matter/substrate and matter, be it unchangeable or not, but (it affects) that which is composed from it and the *eidos*,”<sup>23</sup> that is, the individual beings.

Therefore, as is stated in the *Arbiter*, the resurrection is a new generation of the elements, but not an appearance or any change of the prime matter/substrate. These new elements will be new physically (“by number”) but neither by their prime matter/substrate nor the *eidos*.

## 7. RESOLUTION OF THE DIFFICULTY

We have enough reasons to propose a conjecture for the difficult Philoponian quote in the Cononite florilegium. Most probably, the Cononite text was hypercorrected in conformity with the common Cononite (mis)understanding of the teaching of Philoponus, where Philoponian

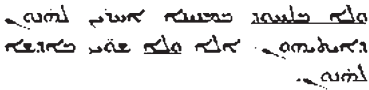
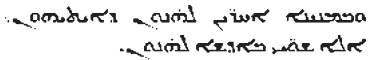
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in number, but the same in species” (U. M. LANG, *John Philoponus and the Controversies over Chalcedon in the Sixth Century. A Study and Translation of the Arbiter* (Spicilegium sacrum Lovaniense. Études et documents, 47), Leuven, 2001, pp. 203–204).

(22) Γένεσις μὲν ἐστὶ μεταβολὴ κατ’ οὐσίαν ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος εἰς τὸ ὄν, ἀλλοίωσις δὲ μεταβολὴ περὶ τι εἰδοπεποιημένον κατὰ τι τῶν συμβεβηκότων αὐτῷ (Ad 314a4; Ioannes Philoponus, *In Aristotelis libros de generatione et corruptione commentaria*, ed. H. VITELLI (CAG, 14.2), Berlin, 1897, p. 8.31–33; Cf. ἔστι γάρ, ὡς εἶπον, γένεσις μὲν μεταβολὴ κατ’ οὐσίαν ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος εἰς τὸ ὄν, ἀλλοίωσις δὲ μεταβολὴ περὶ τι εἰδοπεποιημένον κατὰ τι τῶν περὶ αὐτὸ συμβεβηκότων (Ad 314a8; *Ibid.*, p. 9.30–32).

(23) ἡ γὰρ γένεσις οὐ τοῦ ὑποκειμένου ἐστὶ καὶ τῆς ὕλης, κἂν τε ἀμετάβλητος μένη κἂν τε μή, ἀλλὰ τοῦ ἐξ αὐτῆς καὶ τοῦ εἶδους συγκεκριμένου (Ad 314a8; *Ibid.*, 9.31–10.2).

acknowledgement of the change of *schema* was comprised as the same thing as the change of *eidos*.

Preserved Text	Reconstruction
	
And <u>not only</u> by number will they be different from the present ones, but they will be <u>not</u> identical to them according to the <i>eidos</i>	And by number will they be different from the present ones, but they will be identical to them according to the <i>eidos</i> .

8. CONCLUSION

Philoponus’ teaching on the resurrected bodies can be reconstructed as the following:

- The resurrected bodies are physically (“by number”) completely distinct from their corruptible predecessors,
- but the resurrected bodies share with the corruptible bodies a common soul, which is for them their *eidos* that makes them rational beings, that is, humans,
- therefore, the identity between the resurrected person and the dead person is secured not only with their common soul but also with their common *eidos*, which is now applied to other matter which consists of other elements.
- The nature of the body is changed, but the nature of the whole human being as composed from the soul and the body is not affected.
- From the physical viewpoint, the soul of the human body must be considered its “quantifying *eidos*” (τὸ κατὰ πόσον εἶδος).

SUMMARY

Impossibility of reconstructing Philoponus’ thought concerning the bodily Resurrection resulted from our total dependency on the Cononite sources (the monophysite Tritheist party of the opponents of Philoponus); Timothy of Constantinople (a Chalcedonian) was depending on the Cononite information, too. The Cononites understood Philoponus’ notion of εἶδος as synonymous to σῆμα, whereas its real meaning was different (the soul as a separable ἐντελέχεια of the body etc.).