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Introduction

Anna Marmodoro and Sophie Cartwright

How do our thoughts, emotions and memories relate to our physical existence? The mind–body question goes to the heart of what it is to be human, hence it is one of pivotal importance at any stage of our intellectual history. This volume investigates how a number of representative pagan and Christian thinkers of late antiquity addressed the question. Illuminating the past – how the thinkers of this period thought about the mind and the body – impacts on our present, by giving us a richer range of viewpoints, more awareness of how certain strands of thought developed, a number of arguments and premises against which we can 'test' our intuitions

The '*mind*–body' question, as understood in modern parlance, is more accurately described with reference to classical and late antiquity as a '*soul*–body' question. The soul was typically conceived as the seat of cognition and emotion but, in this pre-Cartesian context, it is also what vivifies the body; it is thought to have some sort of physiological function as well. The 'mind' (*nous* or *mens*) was understood as a part of the soul – the rational and therefore highest part.

What is the human soul made of? How far do our bodies define us, and what does this say about our relationship to the physical universe on the one hand, and human history on the other? How are consciousness and self-awareness possible, and what is it in us that is *self*-aware? What does all of this imply for how we should structure our physical and mental activities? What happens at the moment of death? Throughout late antiquity, pagan and early Christian thinkers grappled creatively with mind–body issues, asking a diverse range of questions and giving answers often of striking originality and of abiding significance. Philosophical anthropological reflections about the nature of body, soul and mind prompted and interacted with ethical and epistemological questions.

This volume presents pagan and Christian ideas about mind and body in late antiquity, from roughly the second to the sixth centuries and from different parts of the (by then wavering) Roman Empire – the modern-day

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Mediterranean, Turkey, North Africa and beyond. The soul–body relation was at the forefront of philosophy and theology at that time. In addressing it, late ancient thinkers were partly picking up on themes from earlier antiquity. However, new contexts and ideas cast these themes in a fresh light: Plotinus' thought, especially his metaphysics and cosmology, reinvigorated Platonism and arguably sent it in a new direction; the rise of asceticism in the third and fourth centuries both accentuated the ethical aspects of mind–body questions and further grounded them in an intensely practical context; late antiquity saw the birth and growth of Christianity. It thus fostered a social and political context in which pagan and Christian authors existed side by side, engaging with, disputing, and influencing each other against the backdrop of each community's fluctuating political fortunes. Late antiquity is a period of unique importance for Christian–pagan interaction.

Late antiquity is also a bridge between the ancient and medieval worlds. The Western intellectual tradition is shaped by the interaction of the classical Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, and Christianity, and late antiquity is the forge in which these two diverse traditions were powerfully fused. Late ancient ideas are therefore of enduring importance. Here we offer reflection on a cross of late ancient ideas on a question as significant as the period itself.[1]

The volume opens with a chapter by Edward Watts, concerning the physical settings wherein pagan and Christian intellectuals operated; the social environments that developed around the teaching of philosophy; and the legal structures that governed teaching. Watts examines the development of independent centres of philosophical teaching (in places like Athens, Aphrodisias, and, later, Nisibis) in the later fourth and early fifth centuries, and argues that this was facilitated by the fact that the focus of the imperial resources of the time *wasn't* on philosophy, which was left as it were free to flourish autonomously. Of such teaching centres there are archaeological remains as well as literary descriptions, which Watts examines in his chapter.

There follow two groups of chapters, one devoted to late antique pagan philosophy and the other to late antique Christian philosophy; each is introduced by a general overview. The first of such overviews is authored by

[1] *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. Fitzgerald Johnson, offers a good overview of this important period. Peter Brown's by now iconic work *The Body and Society* can help to give the reader a further sense of how the soul–body problem sat within it.

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Christopher Shields, who explores key ideas about the ontology of the mind, the mind's relation to the body, and the nature of mental states as developed during the Hellenistic era, considering the distinctive contributions of different philosophical schools.

The theoretical developments in the Hellenistic and late antique period on the soul–body question were grounded on the 'classical' doctrines of Plato and Aristotle, which were part of the education of pagan as well as Christian thinkers of the period under consideration in this volume. Providing an account of Plato's and Aristotle's theories of the soul is beyond the scope of this introduction; so we will limit ourselves here to only a very brief sketch of the key stances of Plato and Aristotle in turn.

Of particular relevance to the concerns of late antique thinkers is the question of whether the soul has some form of existence after the person has died (and if it does, what the implications of this view are for the soul–body relation). Plato had addressed such questions in the *Phaedo*. There Socrates claims not only that the soul is immortal, but also that it 'contemplates truths' after its separation from the body at the time of death. On the other hand, none of the four main arguments Socrates develops in the dialogue succeeds in establishing his two claims. One of the arguments, the so-called 'affinity argument', sets out the conceptual framework needed for saying that body and soul differ in kind, the one being perceptible and perishable, the other being intelligible and exempt from destruction. But Socrates' stated conclusion is that the soul is 'most akin' to intelligible being, and that the body is 'most like' perceptible and perishable being. The argument leaves it open whether soul is part of the realm of what is intelligible, divine and imperishable and human bodies of the realm of what perceptible and perishable; or whether, alternatively, soul has some intermediate status in between intelligible and perceptible being, rising above the latter, but merely approximating to the former. In short, while Plato is often seen as championing a pre-Cartesian version of substance dualism, his views are in fact nuanced and possibly even ambiguous. This ambiguity would play out over the course of late antiquity, in intense dialogue with the legacy of Plato's most brilliant pupil: Aristotle.

With respect to Aristotle, it is clear that for him the soul is not itself a body or a corporeal thing: the soul is a system of abilities possessed and manifested by animate bodies of suitable structure. In giving an account of the soul, Aristotle applies concepts drawn from his broader metaphysical theory, known as *hylomorphism*, according to which all things, man-made or nature-made, can be analysed into two components (which aren't parts): the form, which is the principle of functional organization, and the

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matter in which the said principle is implemented.[2] Thus, Aristotle understands the soul as the substantial form of an organic body, and the body as the matter of the soul; the soul–body relation is only a special case of the general form–matter relationship. The round shape of a ball is distinct from the matter the ball is made of, but cannot exist as such without being implemented in suitable matter. By analogy, the soul is distinct from the body, but cannot exist without an organic body. (The difference between a living organism and the ball is that the soul *qua* organizational principle determines the nature of the matter of the body 'all the way down', by transforming the fluids provided by the mother into flesh and bones in the generation of the organism.) Some late antique thinkers depart very explicitly from Aristotle's treatment of the soul–body relation as part and parcel of his general hylomorphic account of reality; rather, they take an anti-naturalist stance and embrace some version of substance dualism whilst also espousing a version of hylomorphism (some scholars even go as far as attributing body–soul dualism to Aristotle, e.g. Gerson in this volume).

Watts's and Shields's introductory chapters are followed by a series of specific studies on different conceptions of the soul and the soul–body relationship that influential thinkers of the period held: Numenius, Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Themistius (*qua* commentator of Aristotle), Proclus, and Damascius.

Building on previous work,[3] Edwards examines the issue of which account of the soul Numenius actually held, given that the remaining fragments afford evidence for two distinct conceptions. Numenius makes claims to the effect that the soul is single and indivisible; that we have two souls; and that the soul is single but tripartite. The first and the third of these claims are indigenous to the Platonic tradition, and compatible with a providentialist doctrine, according to which the world and the ideal realm above it are both sustained by the *dunamis* of a divine creator (mediated by the world soul), and the soul is capable of discerning the ideal realm by a corresponding exercise of its natural *dunamis*. The claim that we have two souls on the other hand savours more of the Gnostic position, which also appears to have influenced the cosmogony of Numenius. The soul's freedom to affect its own salvation also seems to be limited in Numenius by the activity of demons. Notwithstanding these stances, a simple Gnostic reading of Numenius is precluded by other fragments, which imply that

[2] Substantial forms (e.g. being a man) account for what things are, and accidental forms (e.g. being pale) account for a substance's qualitative change.
[3] Published in the *Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (2010), 115–25.

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the world is a product of divine deliberation. Furthermore, the notion that we possess two souls is not identical with the view that there are two different types of ensouled being, each with its predetermined end. Edwards concludes that it is plausible to think that Platonists and Christians have given us radically different images of Numenius, neither of which encompasses the whole of his philosophy.

Plotinus' account of the soul–body relation radicalizes, one might say, Plato's stance in the *Phaedo* that soul and body are different in kind, and the explanatory role played by the Form is Plato's metaphysics in general. For Plotinus almost nothing about souls is explained by body and almost everything about bodies is explained by soul, by the intelligible world generally, and ultimately by the One or Good. Gerson's chapter explores some of the fundamental reasons adduced by Plotinus for maintaining this stance in the face of the phenomena of embodied human existence.

By contrast with Plotinus, Porphyry is evidently concerned to avoid committing to dualism when conceptualizing the soul–body relation; in his chapter on the topic, Andrew Smith examines areas of Porphyry's thought where this is most apparent. Smith focuses on Porphyry's analysis of the body–matter distinction and his claims concerning the origin of matter (and body) as a mutually dependent *synaition*; Porphyry's concern for moral (and even physical) disengagement from the physical in his promotion of abstinence from eating animal flesh; and Porphyry's notion of quasi-body (*pneuma* of the soul) as 'transitional' between the two forms of existence – corporeal and incorporeal.

In his *De anima*, Iamblichus sets himself apart from his Platonic forebears in regard to the nature of the soul. After stating that other Platonists do not make a clear enough distinction between the Intellect and the soul, he lays out his own doctrine that the soul is a mean between Intellect and Nature. This statement comes as a let-down to the reader as it were, since all Platonists would make the same claim about the position of the soul. John F. Finamore argues in his chapter that what Iamblichus had in mind was in fact quite radical. His view is that the soul changes in its very essence by living two lives, the intelligible and the material one, and is always in the process of changing from one extreme to the other. For Iamblichus the rational soul, formed by the Demiurge himself, is placed first into an etherial vehicle and is then mixed with the irrational side of its nature. Picking up vestments of the elements, this complex eventually takes on a corporeal body and dwells for a time on earth. In his chapter, Finamore discusses the nature of the rational soul and Iamblichus' theory of its double nature; his theory of the vehicle which allows the soul to move downward through the planetary

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More Information

spheres and to make use of its imaginative faculty; the nature and status of the irrational aspects of soul, which Iamblichus believes are also immortal; and the way the soul and body are connected and what that type of connection means for the composite human being. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the role for Iamblichus of theurgy in human life, particularly the soul's re-ascent to Intellect and how Iamblichus framed his doctrine of the soul in line with his belief in the theurgic ascent.

In his 'paraphrase' of Aristotle's *De anima* Themistius disagrees with Alexander of Aphrodisias in denying Aristotle's divine Intellect a role in human psychology. Rather, by drawing on the Platonic tradition, Frans de Haas argues, Themistius endows us a second divine intellect whose influence gets incorporated in the human soul, thus ensuring that each human being is responsible for her own thinking: the divine intellect causes human thought but, for Themistius, the divine intellect does this, *having become part of human intellect.* Building on this idea, Themistius offers new explanations for how different parts of human intellect, and the human soul and body, can comprise a unified individual.

Proclus considers the soul as the source of many mental functions, but certainly not all; yet it also has powers that we are not used to associated with our concepts of the mind. Jan Opsomer argues that Proclus has a more sophisticated and complex account of the animal body and of the soul than Plato had, and he considers the implications of this account for Proclus' ideas about the self. The body, down to its smallest parts, is permeated by the powers of animation and is shaped from within by them. Its parts are organized in such a way that meet the teleology of the whole, which presupposes the presence of soul as a unifying force. The soul itself is multi-layered and comprises appetitive and cognitive functions or powers (stemming from Life and Intellect, respectively) at all its levels. The soul 'proper' – the rational soul – has to be distinguished from the irrational powers of sensation, appetite, desire and memory. These do not belong to the soul *sensu stricto*, but rather to what is called the shadow of the soul. Still lower are the nutritive powers of the vegetative soul that gets identified with the Aristotelian 'entelechy of the body'. On its upper side the rational soul is capable of intellectual activity (the intellect of the soul), owing to its connection to intellect proper. Only the rational soul is, for Proclus, 'the self itself', and only it is immortal. However, it is not, Opsomer argues, what we would think of as a person. Proclus, he argues, has an 'impersonal' picture of immortality.

Sara Ahbel-Rappe shows how Damascius grappled with the seemingly paradoxical nature of embodiment in Neoplatonism. For the Neoplatonists,

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the body was defined by and originated in the soul, and yet the soul seemed to be changed by, perhaps imprisoned by, its body. Damascius departs from Plotinus in holding that the soul really is changed by embodiment. Ahbel-Rappe argues that, for Damascius, the soul's very engagement with the forms that it, after all, projects from itself on embodiment, changes the nature of the soul. The soul is a living being operating with a highly sensitive feedback loop, such that its own activities reciprocally determine its essence. She likens this process to that in which a smart-phone user becomes increasingly attached to their phone. Ahbel-Rappe thus illustrates how the question of the soul's embodiment maps onto the experience and consciousness of the self.

The second group of chapters in the volume focuses on representative Christian thinkers of this period. The introductory chapter is authored by Sophie Cartwright, who explores the contours of the soul–body relationship in early Christianity, with reference to several key figures: Irenaeus, bishop of Lugdunum (Lyons), who argued against the strongly dualistic Gnostic Christianity in the second century; Origen of Alexandria, the third-century Christian Platonist; Methodius of Olympus, writing at the turn of the third to the fourth century in the context of the Diocletianic persecution, and was an heir to both earlier thinkers; Evagrius of Pontus, the desert ascetic of the late fourth century; and Augustine of Hippo. In her chapter, Cartwright demonstrates that the soul–body relationship sits at the heart of a matrix of questions to do with the human being's relationship to God, the value and nature of material creation, the origins of sin, and the meaning of human history, and is reconceptualized in each successive generation.

Vito Limone examines how Paul conceives of the human body with special reference to 1 Corinthians, offering insight into the New Testament background to the Patristic discussions of the soul–body relationship. Limone situates Paul's discussion of body in relation to two of his key aims: to disprove both the Corinthians' libertinism and their doubts about the resurrection of the body. Limone argues that, for Paul, the term *sōma* (body) has four levels of meaning. Firstly, in 1 Cor. 6:12–20, in the context of discussion about *porneia* and unchaste use of the body, *sōma* is linked to the notion of personhood and explicitly distinguished from *sarx*. Similarly, the discussions of marital sex in 1 Cor. 7 and about self-discipline in 1 Cor. 9 treat *sōma* as the whole person. Secondly, the body of Christ, defined in relation to the Lord's Supper, is the personal unity of the individuals through their participation at the Eucharist (1 Cor. 10:16–17; 11:24–9). Thirdly, in 1 Cor. 12:12–27, in a discussion about the relationship between

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Christ and the Church, *sōma* is conceived in terms of integrated unity. Fourthly, the traditional opposition between *sōma* and *psuchē* is completely reformulated by the notions of 'psychic body' and 'pneumatic body', developed in Paul's reflections on the resurrection in 1 Cor. 15:35–44. Limone thus shows that 1 Corinthians offers a rich and multilayered understanding of body with implications for the metaphysics of human nature, human identity and human interdependence.

Benjamin P. Blosser explores early Christian conceptions of the ensoulment of the body, tracing a move away from traducianism and preexistence in the third century towards creationism – the belief that each soul is created individually by God – in the fourth century. Blosser sets discussions on the origin of the soul in the context of discussions about the origin of sin, and concludes by noting that Christian protology of sin remained closely connected to traducianism, and that therefore late antique Christianity bequeathed to its successors two ideas very much in tension.

In his chapter on Christian asceticism, Kevin Corrigan critiques the idea that this asceticism was primarily concerned with escape from the body and its attachments. He argues, first, that Christian asceticism makes possible an altogether new view of the 'flesh' and of body/mind organization; second, that while separation from body as locus of passion, renunciation of passion and withdrawal from the world are crucial features of ascetic practice, Christianity develops a new way of thinking about body and soul that sees them as standing on a continuum, being more related than discrete entities or things; Christian asceticism opened up a new way of thinking about civilization, a *politeia* of not just another world, but of a much bigger world, whose power and authority in Christ, from the Father and through the Spirit, was manifested in the unity of the Church. Christian asceticism, partly on account of its anthropology, offered a framework for a Christian society – a very different picture from Augustine's *City of God*.

Ilaria Ramelli explores the body–soul relation in Origen of Alexandria, Plotinus' contemporary. Origen's ideas about soul and body have proved enduring, controversial and enigmatic. He has often been interpreted as believing that souls originally existed in a disembodied state, and as espousing metensomatosis (also known as transmigration, or reincarnation). Ramelli, however, argues that it is probably incorrect, or at least grossly imprecise, to ascribe to Origen the belief that souls pre-existed any kind of body. For the same reasons, it is also impossible to attribute to Origen the doctrine of metensomatosis. She

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further demonstrates that Origen postulated different degrees of corporeality, and that his terminology of 'corporeal' and 'mental/spiritual' is not absolute, but relative to other degrees of corporeality that may be in question. Failing to grasp this brings about a misunderstanding of Origen's philosophy.

We then have chapters on Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus, the 'Cappadocian Fathers' of the later fourth century, and, in important respects Origen's intellectual heirs. They were involved in the 'Arian' controversy – an argument about the divinity of the Son and, ultimately, about the Trinity. The 'Cappadocian Fathers' are sometimes interpreted as taking a middle position in this dispute, but also for eventually championing the Nicene, anti-Arian, defence of the Son's divinity. In any case, this is not the place for discussion of their respective Trinitarian theologies, but it should be borne in mind that their ideas about body and soul were tied in with fraught disputes about the incarnation and God's relationship to the physical universe.

Claudio Moreschini's chapter focuses on Basil, bishop of Caesarea. Basil was a powerful churchman as well as an influential theologian. He is acknowledged to be influential in the development of Christian monasticism; Moreschini sets Basil's ideas about body and soul in this important ascetic context. Basil began his ascetic life during his youth and had travelled to Egypt and met with the Desert Fathers. However, Moreschini argues that Basil's asceticism is completely different from the austere practices which were characteristic of that region, exemplified by Anthony, Pachomius and others. Refusing to accept the extreme practices of hatred of the body, so typical of the Desert Fathers, he nonetheless reformulated the usual opposition of soul and body in the rules he dictated to his ascetic communities. Platonism and Stoicism also informed his ascetic works. Thus, Moreschini considers how Basil proposed a balanced asceticism, a sensible refusal of the life in the world, effecting a noteworthy moderation in what was understood as 'monasticism'.

Ramelli then considers Gregory, bishop of the small town of Nyssa, and younger brother of Basil of Caesarea. She offers a reassessment of Gregory's ideas on the mind–body relation and his indebtedness to Origen, in light of her, and other recent scholars', reassessment of Origen's anthropology. Ramelli challenges the widespread belief that Gregory attacked Origen for espousing the 'pre-existence of souls'. In fact, Gregory's attack on this doctrine was not targeting Origen. Gregory is often depicted as the advocate of the simultaneous creation of the soul and its mortal body; however, just as Origen never supported the pre-existence of incorporeal souls, it

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More Information

is unlikely that Gregory maintained that each intellectual soul comes into being at the same time as its mortal body.

Brian Matz offers an exploration of Gregory of Nazianzus, the close friend of Basil and also an acquaintance of his brother, Gregory of Nyssa. Examination of the concepts of mind and body in Gregory of Nazianzus reveal a Christian writer steeped in theological contemplation. For him, reflection on mind and body can draw one to reflection upon the person and work of Jesus. This is because mind (*nous*) is that part of ourselves capable of connection with God. It is where the divine and human meet in ourselves; it is where we *image* the *image of God*, Jesus. To the extent that *nous* is shaped by God's presence, it leads the *sōma* to act in ways that are in conformity also with God's will. This is done by *nous* through the agency of *psuchē*, the immaterial part of ourselves that translates the ideas of *nous* into meaningful, bodily responses. This process of bringing *nous*, *psuchē* and *sōma* into conformity with one another is what earlier scholarship on this subject has identified as an existential tension in Gregory. Matz argues that this tension relates to another theological tension, between *pneuma* and *sarx*, the immaterial and material parts of ourselves that lead us towards or away from God, respectively. For Gregory, the *pneuma–sarx* tension is again resolved in Christ – in the unity of humanity and divinity, humanity is no longer torn away from God.

Jay Bregman's chapter explores Synesius of Cyrene, who studied with Hypatia, the pagan Neoplatonist, but was himself at least nominally Christian. Synesius lived at a time when Christianity was gaining ever greater institutional dominance in the Roman Empire through the lens of an important debate about the relationship of Platonism and Christianity in Synesius' thought: how far were Synesius' foundational religious commitments Christian, and how far Neoplatonist? Bregman argues that Synesius' intellectual commitments and starting points were more Neoplatonist than Christian, and also that he brings something unique to the synthesis of these two traditions. In particular, Bregman demonstrates that a Neoplatonic metaphysics of the cosmic soul, unifying everything, is key to Synesius' thought and undergirds his wider treatment of the body–soul relationship.

Giovanni Catapano systematically examines Augustine's arguments about the ontological distinction between soul and body, and more specifically mind and body, drawing out Augustine's conviction that the soul is incorporeal. He demonstrates that, though Neoplatonism was a key influence on Augustine's thought in this area, his sources were both eclectic and flexibly deployed.

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The Greek-speaking writer pseudonymously referred to as Dionysius the Areopagite is named for a figure mentioned in the book of Acts in the New Testament, but was in fact operative in the early sixth century. Wiebke-Marie Stock examines how he transformed Neoplatonic ideas about the body–soul relationship within a Christian framework. Dionysius' reflections on the soul's movements, its formation, ascent and union build on the pagan Neoplatonic thoughts on the topic, and specifically a turn within Neoplatonism towards a more positive attitude to the body. Stock argues that Dionysius' Christian background makes him go further than pagan Neoplatonism in elevating the body. The Christian doctrine of incarnation in particular encourages him to reconsider the pagan depreciation of the body. Stock examines the treatise *On Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* in which Dionysius combines pagan Neoplatonic ideas on liturgical rites with Christian beliefs. All these rites, for Dionysius, are directed towards body and soul. Ultimately, Stock concludes that Dionysius brought original insight to the thorny problem of body–soul antagonism.

Our hope is that this integrated history will open a window onto a highly significant but often neglected series of conversations about the soul and body – those of Graeco-Roman late antiquity. The following chapters contain much that is new, yet also reveal that much more remains to be discovered.

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